

# Essay on Transcendental Realism

## Introduction

The object of realist metaphysics is generally thought to be to describe the structure of the world as it is in itself, or, alternatively, to determine precisely what is real. The purpose of this essay is to suggest that, although there have been many attempts to achieve this goal, they all fall down, not simply because they have misconstrued the nature of the in-itself or precisely what is real, but because, more fundamentally, they are not clear about *what it is* to talk about the in-itself or the real. In short, contemporary realism, both continental and analytic, does not have an adequate concept of **reality**.

To demonstrate this point, I am going to rehearse a couple different dialectics between realist and non-realist positions in order to tease out their inherent problems. This will take up the first two parts of the essay. In the first part I will tackle Quentin Meillassoux's reconstructed dialectic of **correlationism**, and identify some key problems with it. In the second part I will examine several different debates within analytic metaphysics that exhibit a common dialectical structure, within which I will locate a position that I term **deflationary realism**.

The final two parts will bring together the various considerations that have arisen, to show how we can move from deflationary realism to a properly **transcendental realism**, in which the task of realist metaphysics is made properly explicit. In the third part I will define transcendental realism, and outline an argument for it. In the fourth part I will try to work out some additional consequences of the position, while further situating it in relation to the history of philosophy. In particular, I will try to show why the considerations put forward in the essay motivate a return to, and radicalisation of, the Kant's philosophical project.

## Part I: The Classical Dialectic

To begin with, I am going to briefly introduce the classical dialectic between realism and idealism, and show where what Meillassoux calls correlationism stands in relation to it. To this end I am going to introduce a series of definitions:-

Classical Realism: Any position that takes there to be a **real** structure of the world that is **ontologically independent** (and thus distinct from) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Aristotle and Locke.

Classical Idealism: Any position that takes there to be a **real** structure of the world that is in some sense identical to (and thus **ontologically dependent** upon) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Berkeley and Hegel.

This opposition can also be described in terms of how the two positions view the relation between **subject** and **object**, or that between **thought** and **being**. In each case, realism takes the latter to be primary, and to be **independent** of the former, whereas idealism takes the former to be primary, and the latter to be **dependent** upon it. Given this, we can introduce correlationism as the position which gives primacy to neither subject or object, but to the relation between the two:-

Correlationism: Any position which holds that the real structure of the world is to some extent *unknowable*, insofar as knowledge is always relativised to the **subjective conditions** of knowledge (e.g., forms of intuition, cultures, or language-games, etc.). This means that there can be no access to the world as it is **in-itself**, but only as it is **for-us**. This position is exemplified by Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

It is important to note that whereas realism and idealism are defined in explicitly ontological terms, even if they have epistemological consequences, Meillassoux takes correlationism to principally be an **epistemological** position. This does not mean that there cannot be ontological forms of correlationism (e.g., the later Heidegger's notion of Ereignis as the appropriation of Man to Being and Being to Man), but it does hold that correlationism can be motivated independently of ontology. This will turn out to be a crucial point.

In the subsequent discussions we will seek to determine the meaning of three crucial notions that appear within these definitions: **reality**, the **in-itself**, and the **structure of the world**.

## **1. Meillassoux on Correlationism**

Meillassoux takes it that correlationism defeats both realism and idealism, by deploying a different argument against each: the **circle of correlation** against realism, and the argument from **facticity** against idealism.

### **i) The Circle of Correlation**

Meillassoux takes Fichte's initial account of consciousness in the *Wissenschaftslehre* to provide the most basic form of the circle of correlation:-

Fichtean Consciousness: The I (subject) **posits** the not-I (object) as **not posited**.

In essence, consciousness thinks about the object, and attempts to think the object as independent of its thinking. However, it ends up in a **pragmatic contradiction**. The fact that it posits the object contradicts the content it posits, namely, that the object is not posited.

Meillassoux holds that all forms of classical realism display the same pragmatic contradiction. They try to *think* the object as it is independent of *thought*. This is impossible, because one cannot have knowledge of anything independently of the subjective conditions of knowledge. One cannot know if the in-itself is either the *same* as or *different* from the way it appears under these conditions. This is what constitutes the unknowability of the in-itself.

### **ii) The Argument from Facticity**

Classical idealism is immune to the circle of correlation, because it absolutises the correlation itself. It identifies **knowing** with what is **known**, and thereby denies the possibility that the in-itself could be different from how it is for-us. We thus *can* know the real structure of the world, because it is the same as the subjective conditions of knowledge, or the structure of thought.

To refute the idealist, the correlationist needs to shore up the possibility that the in-itself is different from the for-us. This is done by insisting on the **facticity of thought**. This is to say, the existence of thought is taken to be **contingent**. Given that there must be a real structure of the world, this implies that there can be a world without thought, and thus that they are not identical.

### iii) Speculative Materialism

Meillassoux motivates his own neo-realist position by hijacking the argument from facticity. Whereas the idealist absolutises the correlation, Meillassoux absolutises facticity. He does this by showing that the argument against idealism only works on the condition that thought can think its own contingency as an **absolute**, i.e., as something that is not **relative** to the conditions of its thinking. In order for us to know the non-identity of in-itself and the for-us, we must be able to know *absolutely* that there could be a world without thought. We must thus have some absolute knowledge of the **possible**.

However, because we can still have no absolute knowledge of particular entities, this means that in order for thought to be absolutely contingent, **everything** must be absolutely contingent. This leads to a position, which he calls **speculative materialism**, in which we can know the real structure of the world, but this structure is just the structure of the radical contingency of everything.

## **2. Problems with Correlationism**

There are at least three distinct issues with Meillassoux's presentation of correlationism.

### i) Propositions Vs. Concepts

First, the Fichtean account of thought is ambiguous as to whether 'thinking X' is a matter of thinking a **proposition** about X or grasping the **concept** of X. A proposition provides the content of an isolated claim about something, whereas a concept can incorporate a variety of such contents, as long as they are sufficient to **individuate** its object.

For example, it is ambiguous as to whether 'thinking Bill Clinton' is a matter of thinking a specific thing about Bill Clinton, such as 'Bill Clinton is ladies man', or a matter of grasping *who* Bill Clinton is. Alternatively, it is ambiguous whether 'thinking mitochondria' is a matter of thinking something like 'mitochondrial DNA is inherited from the mother' or a matter of grasping a series of facts that specify *what* mitochondria are.

### ii) Presentation Vs. Representation

Secondly, the argument is not sensitive to an important distinction between different accounts of the structure of thought. This is best demonstrated by taking a quote from Meillassoux:-

No X without givenness of X, and no theory of X without a positing of X... the sentence 'X is', means: 'X is a correlate of thought'.

What this demonstrates is that Meillassoux runs together accounts of thought in which objects are *initially* **presented** to us in a certain way (e.g., **phenomenological** accounts of

thought, such as Husserl's), and accounts in which we must *always* **represent** them as being a certain way (e.g., **linguistic** accounts of thought, such as Sellars').

For example, say we encounter a tree in the park and we make an observation statement about it (e.g., 'this tree is green'). The difference between the two approaches is that **presentational** accounts take the content of that observation to have been already given to us in our experience of the tree, and that the statement just makes it explicit, whereas **representational** accounts holds that only the observation statement has content, and that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a 'content' of experience.

The crucial difference between these approaches is that representational accounts emphasise the way that we are **responsible** for the way we take things to be, insofar as we must **actively** represent them as being some way, whereas presentational accounts tend to diminish this responsibility, by treating us as more or less **passive**.

### iii) Two Forms of Dependency

Finally, we can see that the dialectic of correlationism is structured around two different questions about dependence upon the structure of thought.

On the one hand, there is the question of whether the **in-itself** is **ontologically dependent** upon the structure of thought. This is the primary dimension of the debate between classical realism and classical idealism. Correlationism sides with classical realism on this issue, holding that the in-itself cannot be dependent upon thought because of its facticity.

On the other hand, there is the question of whether our **knowledge** of the in-itself is **epistemically dependent** upon the structure of thought. This is the debate over whether we can know anything **absolutely**, or whether all knowledge is **relative**. Correlationism sides with relativism on this issue.

The crucial point is that the correlationist makes the following assumption:-

Sufficiency Thesis: the ontological independence of the in-itself from thought is **sufficient** to establish the possibility that the in-itself could be different from the way it appears in relation to thought, and thus to establish epistemic dependence.

The problem with this thesis is complicated. To understand it, it is necessary to recognise that the circle of correlation does not tell us *how* exactly the **content** of thought is relative to its subjective conditions (or structure). In other words, it doesn't explain what this relativity *consists in*. The problem with the sufficiency thesis is that it only holds if it is supplemented by such an explanation. This is even more problematic than it initially appears, because the essential features of thought that such an account would take to be potentially absent in the in-itself, must be accounted for in **ontological terms**. In essence, the correlationist requires an ontological account of thought, because only such an account can draw consequences from the **ontological fact** about the independence of the in-itself from thought. The real problem here is that such an account would undermine the simplicity, and thus the force of the circle of correlation itself.

The real weakness of Meillassoux's approach is that its understanding of the notion of the

**in-itself**, for all that it is supposed to support an **epistemological** argument, is always *implicitly* **ontological**. This is already indicated in the way Meillassoux situates correlationism between classical realism and classical idealism: the former gives Being primacy over thought, the latter gives thought primacy over Being, and correlationism gives primacy to the relation between the two. The classical positions both view the relation between thought and Being, and thus the question of primacy, in explicitly ontological terms. In defining correlationism in the terms he does Meillassoux guarantees that whatever its epistemological consequences are, it will always be based on some form of implicit ontology.

Viewing the argument in this way also lets us understand the relationship between Meillassoux's **speculative materialism** and Graham Harman's **object-oriented philosophy (OOP)**. In effect, both positions try to draw out the implicit ontological assumptions underpinning the correlationist argument. Meillassoux recognises the ontological character of the assumption that thought is **factual**, and then because correlationism still precludes knowledge of particular entities, he **extends** this facticity to all entities. Harman on the other hand recognises the ontological character of the **epistemic dependence** of thought about the object upon its subjective conditions, and then, for the same reason as Meillassoux, he **extends** this structure of all entities (or objects).

The problem for both speculative materialism and OOP is that their arguments only work if there is some **independent reason** to accept correlationism beyond the very ontological assumptions they draw out of it. However, as we have seen, correlationism requires such ontological assumptions to motivate it. This is not to say that both of these ontological positions are *false*, only that they need to be motivated by different arguments.

In the next two parts of the essay I will expand upon this problem with Meillassoux's presentation of correlationism:-

- 1) I will show that there is a **non-ontological** way of conceiving the dependence of the structure of the world upon the structure of thought. This allows for a further position between classical realism and classical idealism, which I call **deflationary realism**.
- 2) I will provide an alternative account of thought, which provides us with a way of understanding epistemic dependence in a **non-ontological** manner. This allows for a further position which I call **transcendental realism**.

## **Part II: Deflationary Realism**

I will now examine a series of different debates in analytic metaphysics, within which I will uncover a common dialectical structure, and use this to introduce **deflationary realism**. Unfortunately, I will have to ignore much of the context and specific detail of these debates, and will present them in a somewhat truncated form. Nonetheless, it should still be apparent that there is a common philosophical theme running through them.

### **1. Local Deflationism**

Whereas the classical debate between realism and idealism is about the real structure of the world **as a whole**, each of these debates deals with a specific **aspect** of this structure. We will thus make a distinction between **global** and **local** metaphysical debates. It should

be noted that we still have not yet come across a good definition of this notion of 'the real structure of the world', and so it is even less clear what an 'aspect' of it would be. However, examining these debates will bring us closer to understanding both.

### i) Numbers (Quine)

The first debate is a disagreement over whether a particular **domain** of entities **exists**, or whether they are **real**. We'll take numbers as our example, given that they provide the most tried and tested example of such debates in the history of philosophy.

The debate initially takes place between **local realism** about number (traditionally called **platonism**), and **local anti-realism** about number (traditionally called **nominalism**). Both are forms of classical realism, insofar as both take there to be a real structure of the world independent of thought, and both hold that there are *some* domains of entities that are real, and thus part of this structure. For instance, both tend to think that physical objects are real. The difference is that the platonist thinks that numbers are just as real as tables and chairs, whereas the nominalist thinks they are not.

Now, the **deflationary realist** steps into this traditional debate and opposes both forms of classical realism. In this instance, the deflationist is none other than Quine. Quine holds that there is nothing more to existence than **existential quantification**, and that there is no notion of reality distinct from existence. In effect, Quine denies that either form of classical realism can make good sense of what they mean by 'real'.

The major consequence of Quine's view is that all ontological questions about whether or not a given domain of entities exists (or is real) become trivial questions about whether we take there to be true statements which quantify over that domain. For instance, if we take it to be true that 'There are infinitely many prime numbers', we are thereby committed to the existence of both numbers, and prime numbers more specifically. In essence, if we take there to be true **mathematical statements**, then we're committed to the existence of **mathematical objects**.

Quine does qualify this idea somewhat, insofar as he thinks we should only work out existential commitments from those statements that do genuine explanatory work. This means that we work out what exists only on the basis of the claims made by our best scientific theories. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that he does not take scientific claims possess a different *kind* of truth.

There are many problems with this qualification, and with Quine's characterisation of ontological questions more generally. Kit Fine has perhaps provided the most comprehensive critique of the Quinean position. What is most interesting is that he uses this to motivate a **thick** notion of reality in opposition to Quine's **thin** notion. However, Fine does not shake the problem of classical realism, insofar as his definition of reality (in the sense of *realness*) appeals to an intuitive but ultimately unexplained notion of Reality (in the sense of the world as it is in-itself). I will adopt something similar to Fine's approach later on, but I will explicate the intuitive notion of Reality he appeals to (which I will call the Real). The other problem with Fine's account is that he does not show how his notion of reality can be extended outside of debates about the reality of particular domains of entities. As we will see from the two subsequent debates, this is a very important issue.

Leaving all this to one side, we can translate Quine's basic idea as follows:-

Quine Thesis: There is no **thick** notion of reality for entities, but only a **thin** notion. An entity is real in this sense *iff* we take there to be something **true** of it.

## ii) Values (McDowell Vs. Blackburn)

The second debate is a disagreement over whether certain kinds of **predicates** pick out **real properties**. The predicates in question are **values** such as 'good', 'beautiful' and 'funny'. In this debate, Simon Blackburn plays the role of the local anti-realist. He opposes his position, which he calls **quasi-realism** about value, to what he calls **naïve realism** about value, which is the corresponding local realism.

The naïve realist supposedly holds that entities in the world are really imbued with values, independently of the way we take them to be. This means that a sunrise could be beautiful even if sentient creatures had never evolved, in just the same sense that it would still last the same amount of time even if no systems of time measurement had ever been invented. In opposition to this, Blackburn claims that the properties studied by the natural sciences are real, but that values are not. Instead, he holds that values are **projected** onto the world by us. The sunset is beautiful just in the sense that we project some positive reaction it produces in us upon certain genuine properties it possesses.

The deflationary realist in this debate is John McDowell, who classifies his position as **anti-anti-realism**. The crux of the debate between McDowell and Blackburn is whether or not statements which predicate values of objects are **truth-apt**. For a statement to be truth-apt is just for it to be able to be **true** or **false**. Blackburn effectively tries to deny truth-aptness to value statements by showing how the ways we identify and argue about values fall short of the **paradigm case** of those properties studied by the natural sciences.

In response to this, McDowell has a number of good points, but his central argument is that even if value discourse can never have the form of natural scientific discourse, it nonetheless displays all the features characteristic of assessing the truth and falsity of claims. We can give detailed reasons for and against value-ascriptions, deploying whole networks of interconnected value concepts. For instance, assessment of whether something is funny does not simply depend upon our dispositions to laugh at it, but can involve appeals to complex concepts like satire and irony.

In essence, McDowell establishes **deflationary standards** for what kinds of discourse count as truth-apt, and then denies that there is anything more to the reality of properties than there being true claims about them. On this basis, we can locate a parallel of the Quine Thesis:-

McDowell Thesis: There are only **thin** notions of **reality** and **truth**. A property is real *iff* we take some ascriptions of it to entities to be true.

## iii) Modality (Lewis Vs. Blackburn and Price Vs. Brandom)

The third debate is harder to classify than the first two. It regards the reality of the **modal** dimension of the world, or the reality of **possibility and necessity**. The problem with classifying this is that, although it can potentially be interpreted as a debate about whether

or not a certain kind of entity exists, namely, **possible worlds**, or as whether there are real modal properties, such as **dispositions**, it is really more general than this. This can be demonstrated by considering two different versions of the debate, between David Lewis and Simon Blackburn on the one hand, and Huw Price and Robert Brandom on the other.

Taking the former debate first, Blackburn initially attacks Lewis, who is famous for advocating the reality of possible worlds, as if he occupies the local realist position. Blackburn's own view is that modal discourse is projective in a similar way to his view of value discourse. However, Lewis' response to Blackburn reveals that he is in fact a deflationary realist. In effect, he accuses Blackburn of ascribing a thick notion of reality to the **actual** which he denies to the **possible**. By contrast, he is not claiming that possible worlds are real in the **thick** sense, but deploying a uniformly **thin** sense of reality on which the possible and actual are on equal footing. Lewis argues that we take modal claims (e.g., counterfactuals) to be true, and that we must thereby commit ourselves to the existence or reality of whatever is required to properly interpret their **truth**. This means that we are committed to the reality of the elements we use to formulate the **semantics** of modal discourse. For David Lewis, this means the reality of possible worlds.

The debate between Price and Brandom is parallel to this. Price takes up a similar quasi-realist position to Blackburn, from which he criticises Brandom's own **modal realism**. The question of whether Price is actually a classical realist is not straightforward, but we needn't answer it. This is because it is Brandom's defense of his position against Price which gives him an affinity with Lewis. He explicitly denies that we can make any sense of the idea of a **real structure of the world** distinct from the **structure of our thought and talk** about it. He then maintains precisely the same position as Lewis: we are committed to whichever features of the world we need to make sense of the semantics of modal discourse. The main difference between Brandom and Lewis is that he takes **incompatibility relations** between propositions (and the facts they represent) as his semantic primitives, and thus is not committed to the reality of possible worlds.

What comes out of these related debates is that there can be aspects of the world not straightforwardly reducible to questions about entities and their properties. We can translate the basic ideas of Lewis and Brandom as follows:-

Lewis-Brandom Thesis: There is only a **thin** notion of reality with respect to **aspects** of the world. An aspect of the world is real in this sense *iff* we take there to be **true** claims about it. The nature of this aspect is determined by the **semantics** of those claims.

## **2. Global Deflationism**

Now that we've had a look at the way deflationary realism functions within local debates, we can try to work out the general character of the position. An important point to make is that it is not possible to be a deflationist in one debate and not in another. This is because the deflationist's tactic involves substituting a thick notion of reality for a thin one, and it is the same notion which is deployed in all these debates. This means that if one is a deflationary realist, one must be a **global** deflationary realist.

I think we can pick out three essential insights of deflationary realism from the debates just considered:-



- 1) There is a crucial link between a **thin** notion of reality and the notion of **truth** (from the Quine Thesis).
- 2) To be genuinely deflationary, this notion of truth must be **equally thin** (from the McDowell Thesis).
- 3) The **structure of the world** is reflected by the **semantics** of our truth claims. This means that the structure of the world is reflected by the **structure of our thought and talk** about it (from the Lewis-Brandom Thesis).

#### i) Brandom's Deflationism

Now, just because all of the deflationary realists discussed above *should* have a coherently articulated global deflationist position doesn't mean that they do. The exception is Robert Brandom, who articulates a systematic position that incorporates all three insights just discussed. Brandom does this by explicitly addressing the question of the **dependency** of the structure of the world on the structure of thought. However, he articulates a dependency thesis which is **non-ontological**, and which thus does not collapse into classical idealism. To do this, Brandom introduces the notions of **sense dependency** and **reference dependency**:-

Sense Dependency: "Concept P is sense dependent upon concept Q just in case one cannot count as having grasped P unless one counts as grasping Q."

Reference Dependency: "Concept P is reference dependent upon concept Q just in case P cannot apply to something unless Q applies to it."

In short, P is sense dependent upon Q if one cannot understand P without understanding Q, and reference dependent upon Q if there cannot be P without Q. The former is a kind of **epistemic dependence**, whereas the latter is a kind of **ontological dependence**.

Brandom then points out that there can be sense dependence is **independent** of reference dependence, meaning that there can be sense dependence without reference dependence. He also points out that sense-dependence is by default an **asymmetrical** relation, meaning that there can be one-way sense dependence. For example, one cannot understand the concept 'nail' without the concept 'hammer', but it is entirely possible that we could destroy all hammers, and yet there would still be nails. Equally, one can understand 'hammer' without understanding 'nail', because hammers may be used to do things other than hitting nails.

We can then articulate Brandom's position as follows:-

- 1) The **world** is all that is the case, or the totality of what is true. This is the same definition of world with which Wittgenstein opens the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.
- 2) **Thought** is just the rational process through which we update and revise what we take to be true.
- 3) The concept of world is **reciprocally sense dependent** upon the concept of

thought. This means that one cannot understand the structure of the world without understanding the structure of this rational process, or vice versa.

The consequence of this is that Brandom takes there to be various pairs of fundamental concepts that must be understood together or not at all. For instance, he thinks that we cannot understand what **objects** are apart from understanding what **singular terms** are, that we cannot understand what **properties** are apart from understanding what **predicates** are, that we cannot understand what **facts** (or **states of affairs**) are apart from understanding what **claims** (or **assertions**) are, and he thinks that we cannot understand what **laws** are apart from understanding what **counterfactual robustness** is.

This then allows him to make various claims about the structure of the world, on the basis of claims about the structure of thought (which for him is just the **semantics** and **pragmatics** of language). For instance:-

- 1) Propositions necessarily have a **subject-predicate** structure, therefore, the world must be composed of **objects** and **properties**.
- 2) **Facts** are just **true claims**, and there are **normative truths**, therefore there are **normative facts**.
- 3) There are **modal** incompatibility relations between propositions, and between predicates, therefore there are modal incompatibility relations between **states of affairs**, and between **properties**.

Now, it should be noted that Brandom actually calls this position '**objective idealism**', and he takes it to be Hegel's position, as well as his own (even if he does take himself to disagree with Hegel on the possibility of providing an exhaustive account of **logic**, and thus **metaphysics**). However, I think that Brandom is incorrect in ascribing this deflationary position to Hegel, insofar as Hegel most definitely has more classical metaphysical ambitions when it comes to the applicability of his *Logic*. I therefore take myself to be justified in classifying Hegel as a classical idealist (albeit the most powerful and subtle of them) and Brandom as a deflationary realist.

Moving on, Brandom provides us with the resources to posit the general definition of deflationary realism we are seeking:-

Deflationary Realism: Any position which denies that there is a **thick** sense of reality, and which holds that the structure of the world and the structure of thought are **reciprocally sense dependent**, without being **reference dependent**.

## ii) Deflationism Vs. Correlationism

I have thus shown that it is possible to have a position between classical realism and classical idealism that is not correlationism. Moreover, the possibility of this position tells against the **Sufficiency Thesis** that the correlationist argument depends upon. This is because the deflationist can accept that the world is **ontologically independent** from thought, and thus that there could be a world *without* thought. In short, the deflationist can accept the **facticity of thought** and still hold that the structure of the world is dependent upon the structure of thought (albeit reciprocally).

It is thus the case that deflationary realism trumps correlationism. This means that the only way to avoid deflationary realism is to answer the deflationist's challenge to classical realism, by providing a genuinely thick notion of **reality**. However, this thick notion of reality must not appeal to the ontologically defined notion of the **in-itself** deployed by correlationism, lest it collapse back into correlationism. I think that the only position capable of meeting this task is what I call **transcendental realism**. The rest of the essay will be devoted to expounding this position.

### **Part III: Transcendental Realism**

Deflationary realism is an impressive position, especially when it is explicitly articulated in the form Brandom presents. However, I don't think that it is right. There are a variety of reasons for this, some of which are specific to the various local debates we've considered (see Fine's critique of Quine on existence), but the simplest and most compelling is that we seem to have an intuitive grasp of a genuinely **thick** notion of reality. This is obvious when we look at the debate between platonism and nominalism. We have a good understanding of the difference between the positions, the problem is simply that no one has managed to make explicit the role that the term 'real' is playing in the debate. This is what lets the deflationist claim that the argument makes no sense.

The task before us is thus to explicitly define a thick notion of reality. However, in doing so we must also avoid defining reality in **ontological** terms. This is because the notion of reality is actually supposed to make sense of what ontology is, not vice-versa. The only way to do this is to define reality in **epistemological** terms. This means providing a non-ontological account of the structure of thought, and then showing that there is a thick notion of reality *implicit* within it. I take this to be the essence of a genuinely **transcendental** approach to realism. I will thus define transcendental realism as follows:-

Transcendental Realism: Any position that shows that the structure of thought itself implies that there is a **real** structure of the world in **excess** of the structure of thought.

It is important to note that this position is actually a development of deflationary realism, rather than a simple return to classical realism. This can be seen if we look at the dependence relations this definition implies.

For transcendental realism, the structure of the world is sense-dependent upon the structure of thought, but the dependence is *not* reciprocal. This looks strange, until one realises that understanding the structure of thought is a **necessary** but not **sufficient** condition of understanding the structure of the world. In short, one must understand the structure of thought in order to understand **what it would be** to give a proper account of the **real** structure of the world. This is what Kant would call the **critique of metaphysics**, which is supposed to come before **metaphysics** itself.

#### **1. Rethinking Thought**

I'm now going to suggest a way of motivating transcendental realism, and I'm going to do this by sketching an alternative account of thought to the one Meillassoux provides. The account of thought I'm going to present is based on the historical successor to Fichte's account of consciousness, namely, Hegel's account of **Natural Consciousness** in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

### i) Hegel Contra Fichte

Hegel's account is almost as simple the Fichtean one we considered earlier. It posits two basic features of consciousness:-

- 1) Consciousness **relates itself** to its object, or takes its object to be a certain way. What this means, is that it **makes a claim** about its object.
- 2) Consciousness distinguishes between its relating (or its claim) and the object as it is **in itself**. In essence, consciousness allows for the **possibility of error**.

These then have two implications:-

- 3) Because consciousness *itself* makes the distinction between its claim and the object it is about, the object cannot be truly **in-itself**, but must be **for-consciousness**. This means that consciousness must have a **concept** of its object.
- 4) However, consciousness cannot be aware that the object is for-it without ceasing to be consciousness, and thus must **suppress** this fact. This means that consciousness cannot recognise that the concept of the object is **dependent upon it**, without undermining the possibility of error.

The first thing to recognise is that this account solves the two problems we identified with Meillassoux's account of thought. First, the proposition/concept ambiguity of the Fichtean approach is resolved by having a role both for **propositional claims about** objects (1&2) and for **concepts of** objects (3&4). Secondly, although it is misleadingly named 'consciousness' this is most definitely a **representational** account of thought. Consciousness is **active** in making claims about its object, and is thus **responsible** for those claims. Moreover, it undertakes this responsibility by establishing the object as an **independent standard** distinct from its claim. It is precisely by giving the object **authority** over whether its claim is correct that consciousness opens up the possibility of error.

The next thing to note is that Hegel has effectively split Fichte's notion of 'positing as not posited' into two distinct subjective acts: what I will call **withdrawing authority** (2), and **suppressing the concept** (4).

Withdrawing authority is just a different way of talking about the way consciousness opens up the possibility of error. The reason I am using this term is that granting authority to the object over whether one's claims about it are correct can also be viewed as a matter of **withdrawing** one's own authority over one's claims. In doing so, one thereby undertakes a responsibility to provide **reasons** why one's claim is correct if **challenged**. It is precisely by undertaking a responsibility to give reasons for one's claims about an object that one thereby undertakes a responsibility to that object. In effect, what all of this means is that all claims are essentially **open to debate**.

In contrast to this, the **content** of concepts is not always open to debate. This is because mutual grasp of a concept is a **condition of the possibility** of disagreement *about* anything. For example, we can only have a genuine argument about whether 'Bill Clinton is a ladies man' if we both understand *who* Bill Clinton is, and *what* being a 'ladies man'

entails. The point is that in order to open up the possibility of error, we must nonetheless **exclude** some things from the resulting debate. So, while we accept the possible difference between the our **claim** and the object in itself, we **suppress** the possible difference between our **concept** and the object it stands for.

## ii) Mind Independence Vs. Attitude Independence

This account of the basic structure of thought gives us the resources to properly articulate **epistemic dependence** in a **non-ontological** manner. We can do this by distinguishing between two different ways of understanding the notion of the **in-itself**: in terms of **mind independence** and in terms of **attitude independence**.

Mind Independence: Something is in-itself is if can **exist** independently of the existence of minds.

Attitude Independence: Something is in-itself if **the way it is** is independent of **the way we take it to be**.

The former is an ontological understanding the in-itself, whereas the latter is non-ontological. Importantly, it is the fact that this is a **representational** account of thought, rather than a **presentational** one, that makes this possible. This is because it enables us to conceive of the relation between subject and object in terms of **authority** and **responsibility**. In essence, the withdrawal of authority is a matter of establishing a form of attitude independence.

I would suggest that Meillassoux's indifference to the distinction between presentation and representation, and Harman's dependence upon a phenomenological, and thus presentational, account of thought, is what leads them to adopt the ontological understanding of the in-itself. By contrast, the Hegelian model of thought enables us to adopt the epistemological understanding of the in-itself, and thus to undercut the arguments for their respective ontologies.

On this basis, we may also reformulate the **intuition** underlying correlationism in more exacting terms:-

Correlationist Intuition: The suppression of the concept prevents us from ever establishing the **absolute attitude independence** of the object of representation. This means that whether or not our claims about the object are true is never completely up to the object, but is always **mediated** by something that we, either as individuals or as a community, have **authority** over.

## iii) Types of Truth

Let us call this absolute attitude independence **objectivity**. For a claim to be **objectively assessable** is for its **truth** to be independent of any attitudes that anyone has ever had, or will have. This means that no claims about anyone's attitudes can count as **good reasons** for taking it to be true. The correlationist intuition can then be understood as the claim that we are unable to objectively assess the truth of **any** claim.

Now, it is important to note that some truth claims are obviously not objectively assessable

in this way. For instance, the claim 'Harry Potter is a wizard' is not assessable independently of our attitudes about Harry Potter. Indeed, there are claims such as 'Harry Potter has a secret half-sister' that we would take JK Rowling's attitudes to have special **authority** over. In these cases, we can nonetheless have arguments about whether the claim is true, because we can still withdraw our own authority, even if we cannot withdraw JK Rowling's.

In these cases we have established a form of **relative attitude independence**.

What this indicates is that in contrast to deflationary realism, which holds that there is only a single notion of truth, there are at least two kinds of truth: **objective** and **non-objective** truth. There thus is a **thin** concept of truth which functions as a **genus** and a variety of **thick** notions of truth which function as its **species**. The withdrawal of authority and the attitude independence it establishes is the **common form** of truth, and the various ways this withdrawal is modified, producing a variety of forms of relative and absolute attitude independence, constitute the variety of **types of truth**.

It is this insight which gives us the leverage we need to not only overcome deflationism, but to resolve many of the issues involved in the various local debates we considered:-

- 1) The problems with Quine's attempt to distinguish a privileged set of truth claims from which to work out ontological commitments can be overcome if we posit a distinct type of truth. Instead of working out our ontological commitments from the set of **scientific** claims we take to be true, we can work it out on the basis of the set of claims we take to be **objectively** true.
- 2) The debate between Blackburn and McDowell can be resolved once we recognise that it is not a matter of whether both scientific and value discourse are **truth-apt** in the same sense, but a matter of determining the differences in the structure of these discourses which differentiate the **types of truth-aptness** they exhibit.
- 3) This will give us the resources we need to extend the notion of **aspects** of the structure of the world we uncovered in the debates over modality, and the connection between these and the **semantics** of discourse, by allowing us to break the **reciprocity** of Brandom's pairs of sense dependence of Brandom's pairs of fundamental concepts.

However, we will only be able to achieve any of these goals if we can fight off the challenge to objectivity that the reformulated **correlationist intuition** represents.

#### iv) Conceptual Revision

The key to this is grasping two interconnected points. First, that our concepts are not fixed, but are **revisable**. Second, that the world itself can sometimes **force** us to revise our concepts. This makes the assessment of those concepts independent of our attitudes in a principled way.

First, it is important to recognise that the suppression of the concept is not irrevocable. It is possible for us to argue about the content of our concepts, but doing so **suspends** the initial debates which those concepts were a condition of. In short, we always perform a

**suspension of representation** in order to examine the **conditions of representation**. The important point is that we can never perform a **global** suspension, but only **local** suspensions. This is just to say that if we disagreed about **everything** then we couldn't disagree about **anything**. If we are to **examine** some concepts, we must always **use** others.

Second, we must distinguish between two types of **commitments** one can undertake by making **claims** (and thus two types of claim):-

Objectual Commitments: Undertaken by claims about specific **objects** (e.g., 'this liquid tastes sour', and 'everyone in this room has excellent taste in philosophy'). These constitute the content of **singular concepts** (e.g., 'Bill Clinton is male', 'Bill Clinton was president of the US', etc.).

Conditional Commitments: Undertaken by claims which make explicit **inferential rules**. These constitute the content of **predicate concepts** (e.g., 'if something *tastes sour* then it is an *acid*' and 'if something is an *acid* then it *turns litmus paper red*').

It is to some extent obvious that we can be **forced** to revise our objectual commitments about objects on the basis either of **perception**, wherein further objectual commitments are acquired, or of **inference**, in virtue of the rules relating the predicates used in them. It is thus to some extent obvious that we can be forced to revise our singular concepts.

However, we can also be forced to revise the **inferential rules** which constitute the content of our predicate concepts on the basis of perception. So, let us take the above example of the concept 'acid', which we will take to be constituted by the two inferential rules:-

- 1) If something *tastes sour* then it is an *acid*.
- 2) If something is an *acid* then it *turns litmus paper red*.

Now, say that through perception we then acquire an objectual commitment of the form:-

- 3) This liquid *tastes sour* **and** it *turns litmus paper blue*.

We are now in a position where our perceptually acquired commitments **contradict** the content of our concept. This means that if we accept the truth of the observation statements, we are **forced** to revise our concept of acid, by abandoning or modifying one or more of these rules. This example of objective concept revision is deliberately very simple. The truth is that there is a lot more to the content of concepts, and thus a lot more to the structure of the process of revision. I cannot provide an exhaustive account of this structure here, but I will provide an overview of how this picture needs to be supplemented.

#### v) Dimensions of Conceptual Content

First of all, we have to get a bit more clear about what **concepts** are. It is important to recognise Kant's insight that concepts are **rules** for making judgments. It is also important to recognise Brandom's pragmatic insight that we must understand the **propositions**

which form the contents of judgments in terms of the **assertions** which express them. Since assertions are principally **linguistic**, this means we must understand them in terms of the **sentences** deployed in those assertions. We thus have a threefold distinction between the **pragmatic** (assertion), **syntactic** (sentence), and **semantic** (proposition) dimensions of thought and talk. Kant's insight thus becomes Sellars' insight that to understand a concept is to understand the rules governing the use of a **word** in forming sentences which can be asserted, through which we express propositions. This is not only a **representational**, but a properly **linguistic** account of thought.

Given this, we can see that there is more to the **content** of concepts than the rules made explicit by inferential commitments. This is most evident in the distinction between concepts governing the use of **singular terms** and **predicates**. The obvious move would be to understand their content as being **exhausted** by objectual and conditional commitments, respectively. However, at the very least, familiar Kripkean problems with **proper names** (which are a type of singular term) imply that the content of singular concepts cannot be understood as what is made explicit by objectual commitments alone. Indeed, as Putnam has shown, the problem is more general than this, insofar as it extends to **natural kind terms** (which are a type of predicate). What underlies both of these problems is a general worry about how it is possible for us to argue about the rules governing the use of the **same** word (or the content of the corresponding concept), if what **individuates** that word (or concept) from its **homonyms** (which have **distinct** concepts, e.g., the 'bank' of a river from the 'bank' on the high street) is just these rules. In essence, there must be more to the **individuation** of concepts.

These **semantic externalist** challenges require us to posit some additional mechanism whereby we can have some minimal grasp of the use of a word which fixes its identity, allowing us to argue about how *that very word* (as distinct from its homonyms) should be used. The classical way to do this is to posit a special set of claims that one must accept in order to count as understanding the concept. These are **analytic** claims, and there can be no genuine disagreement about them. Only the opposing **synthetic** claims can support such genuine disagreements. I take Quine to have adequately demonstrated that there is no principled way of drawing this distinction, and thus take all claims to be synthetic. In the account I am presenting the intuitive boundary between analytic and synthetic is captured by **conceptual suppression**, wherein we hold the content of the concept **fixed** in relation to those claims that we open up for debate. The boundary is thus **dynamic** rather than **static**, shifting relative to the focus of the debate. It is important to recognise that rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction in this way is a condition of accepting full blown conceptual revisability.

The crucial point is to recognise that the additional mechanism required to respond to the semantic externalist challenge must also make possible **semantic deference**, such as cases in which we use words of which we have a partial grasp, but can nonetheless defer to experts who have a fuller grasp. For example, it is possible for two lay people to have a fairly interesting discussion about black holes, even though they only have a partial understanding of *what* black holes are. It is even possible for them to disagree about bits of what they do understand, and nonetheless be still talking about the **same** thing. This is because they have the ability to **defer** to physicists about the correct ways to use the word, or about what is true of black holes. There can be similar kind of debates about particular objects. For example, it's entirely possible for me to talk about Bill Clinton, even if I've never met him, indeed, even if I couldn't pick him out of a crowd, as long as I can



defer to the way others use the name 'Bill Clinton'.

The answer to these problems, which Brandom goes a long way toward articulating, is that language use depends on an ability to keep track of relations of **anaphoric dependence** between different uses of words. The simplest kinds of such relations are exhibited by uses of anaphoric pronouns within and between sentences, such as in the sentence '*Bill Clinton* is a ladies man, but *he* is a mediocre saxophonist'. Here there is a simple anaphoric relation between my use of the name 'Bill Clinton' and the pronoun 'he', where the latter gets its significance from the former. This is true regardless of who I pick out with the name 'Bill Clinton'. I could be speaking about a different Bill Clinton than the former president of the US, but I'd still be claiming *both* that he is a ladies man *and* that he's a mediocre saxophonist. The important point is that these kinds of relation, where one use of a word can inherit its significance from another, can extend between the uses of different speakers. Thus, if a friend of mine has never heard of either Bill Clinton, but I tell him that he is a mediocre saxophonist, when he goes on to tell other people about a saxophonist called Bill Clinton, he'll be referring to whoever I was referring to, in virtue of a dependence relation between our uses of the term. This holds equally of predicates as it does of singular terms. It is by virtue of being able to track these kinds of anaphoric dependence relations that we can take each other to be using the **same concept**, even if we disagree about particular features of its content. It is also what enables semantic deference of the kind just discussed.

There is a further dimension of conceptual content which needs mentioning, which is the role that our **practical understanding** of things contributes to content of our concepts of them. This is an idea common to both Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. As we've already noted, grasping a concept is understanding how to use a word. This is already a kind of practical understanding. Although this understanding might be to some extent **explicit**, for instance, we might have conditional commitments that **codify** the inferential rules we follow in using the word, it will always depend upon some understanding that is **implicit**. This is the import of Wittgenstein's rule-following regress. What it means is that shared **concepts** will always be dependent upon shared **practices**. Heidegger's insight is that these shared practices for using **words** are in turn dependent upon our shared practices of dealing with the **things** that those words refer to.

The real significance of this is that whereas it is possible for us to engage in **explicit concept revision**, by first making explicit the content of our concepts and then putting them into question, it is also possible for there to be **implicit concept revision**, insofar as our practices for dealing with things, and thus the practices for using words that are dependent upon them, can **adapt** to the things themselves. In the implicit case, the world **indirectly** forces us to revise our concepts, by **causing** us to change our practices. In the explicit case, the world **directly** forces us by providing us with **good reasons** to do so. The distinction is precisely one between **causal** and **normative** force.

On the basis of this, we can hold that in order to be counted as a **rational subject**, or as something that can genuinely think and talk **about** the world, one must **be-in-the-world** in something like Heidegger's sense, or have a **form-of-life** in something like Wittgenstein's sense. This is because we are only in touch with the world insofar as it **objectively constrains** our thought about it, and this is the case only insofar as it can force us to either implicitly or explicitly revise the concepts we apply to it. This means that one needn't be able to explicitly revise one's concepts in order to be a rational subject, but that the

potential for acquiring the **logical vocabulary** (conditionals and negation) required to do so is nonetheless implicit within the abilities of such **non-logical** rational beings.

To conclude this section, we can thus draw a distinction between the **primary** and **secondary** dimensions of conceptual content. **Objectual** and **conditional** commitments make explicit the rules constituting the primary dimension of conceptual content. These provide the **representational core** of the content of **singular** and **predicate** concepts, respectively. The secondary dimension of both kinds of conceptual content is articulated by the **anaphoric relations** between particular uses of words and the **practical relations** between the way we use things and the way we talk about them. These provide the **non-representational periphery** of conceptual content, but they are no less essential to it. The reason for this is that the secondary dimension is what makes possible the **revision** of the first, and thus what lets it be properly **constrained** by what it aims to represent. On the one hand, tracking anaphoric relation is what enables us to **disagree** about the primary content of the **same** concept, and thus what to revise that primary content through argument. On the other, tracking practical relations is what enables the **things** we deal with to constrain the way we use the **words** that correspond to them.

Providing a detailed story about the relation between the primary and secondary dimensions of conceptual content is just describing the way the latter structures arguments about the former. Doing this is just a matter of giving a much more detailed account of the suspension of representation.

## 2. Objectivity

Moving on from the discussion of the content of concepts, we can now properly articulate a defence against the correlationist challenge. The first thing to recognise is that although we can never *completely* withdraw authority in any given debate, or that we cannot perform a **global** suspension of representation, there is an **ideal subset** of our truth claims in which:-

- 1) There is no claim for which we cannot perform a **local** suspension, and thus bring the concepts it deploys into question.
- 2) There is no claim about the **primary** content of these concepts that cannot itself be suspended, bringing the concepts deployed in it into question. In principle (if not always in practice) there may be **recursive suspension**.
- 3) There are no claims about **attitudes** (e.g., 'Pete *believes that* Bill Clinton is a ladies man', 'Most people *believe that* unicorns are white', 'The Norse people *believed that* Thor is the son of Odin', etc.).
- 4) There are no claims the **assessment** of which **bottoms out** in claims about attitudes (e.g., 'Harry Potter has a secret half sister', 'Unicorns *are* white', 'Thor *is* the son of Odin', etc.).

This subset is just the set of **objective truth claims**, i.e., those things we take to be true independently of the attitudes anyone ever had or will have.

## i) Bottoming Out

To unpack this a bit more, this means that all **objective assessment**, or **arguments** about claims within this subset, including all arguments about the primary content of the concepts deployed within these claims (and by recursion, all arguments about the primary content of concepts that these depend on), cannot deploy claims about attitudes as **reasons**. The only exception to this are claims in which there are further reasons why those attitudes are authoritative that do not **ultimately** depend upon claims about attitudes for which we cannot in turn supply such further reasons. This is what it is to say that arguments should not **bottom out** in claims about attitudes.

An argument bottoms out in this way either when it must appeal to the **ultimate authority** of some group or individual, or when it is not possible to make a claim without **pragmatic contradiction**. In those cases, we can say that the claims being made are **non-objective**. In the former case they are **interpretational** claims and in the latter case they are **transcendental** claims. The former are non-objective because they appeal to *specific* attitudes, and the latter are non-objective because they provide the structure of attitudes *as such* (insofar as they provide the **conditions of the possibility** of having attitudes). It is interesting to note that, because we have rejected the possibility of analytic truth, these transcendental claims are by definition **synthetic a priori** claims.

It is important to recognise that this ‘bottoming out’ should not primarily be understood as a matter of reaching **indubitable** claims about which there can be no debate. Although there are interpretative cases in which there is a sole authority that can settle the debate directly through **stipulation**, these are not necessarily the norm. We can engage in very complex interpretative debates about the beliefs and intentions of those who have such authority if they cannot enter the debate directly (e.g., interpreting the works of dead authors), and we can engage in similar interpretative debates about matters which are determined by **communal**, rather than **individual** authority (e.g., communal norms, and claims such as ‘Thor is the son of Odin’). The structure of these debates is just the structure of **hermeneutic rationality**. Similarly, in the case of arguments about the transcendental structure of thought itself, although there are obvious cases of pragmatic contradiction, there can equally be arguments wherein the proof that the denial of a claim leads to pragmatic contradiction will be very elaborate (and thus debatable). We might call the structure of these debates the structure of **reflective rationality**.

What ‘bottoming out’ consists in is thus not a regress to claims about which there can be no debate, but rather, a fundamental shift in the structure of the debate itself. The only way to understand this properly is to examine the structure of those debates which don’t bottom out in this way. The major thing we have identified about these debates is that all of the concepts deployed within them are subject to revision, and that they are subject to revision in a way which is not dependent either upon **specific attitudes** (as in the interpretational case) or upon the structure of **attitudes as such** (as in the transcendental case). In the absence of these, the only thing that can force us to revise our concepts is the **world** itself. However, there are two different forms that this kind of revision can take, and thus two different kinds of objective claims: **empirical** claims and **mathematical** claims.

## ii) Varieties of Discourse

What differentiates empirical from mathematical discourse is the kind of claims they give

**priority** to. Empirical discourse gives priority to **perceptually acquired objectual commitments**, insofar as these can force us to revise the contents of our concepts, as we saw in the simplified example of the concept of 'acid' above. Mathematical discourse, on the other hand, gives priority to its **axioms**, from which all particular mathematical truths must be derivable. These axioms are a set of claims which specify the rules of mathematical deduction (conditional claims), and a few basic premises from which these can proceed (objectual claims). Most importantly, the axioms are revisable, but they are not revisable on the basis of anything like observation claims about independently accessible **mathematical objects**, since everything about these objects is derived from the axioms. It is not exactly clear how the world forces us to revise our axioms, but I take this not to be a problem, but rather to indicate the possibility of a deeper understanding of the **metaphysical** status of mathematics.

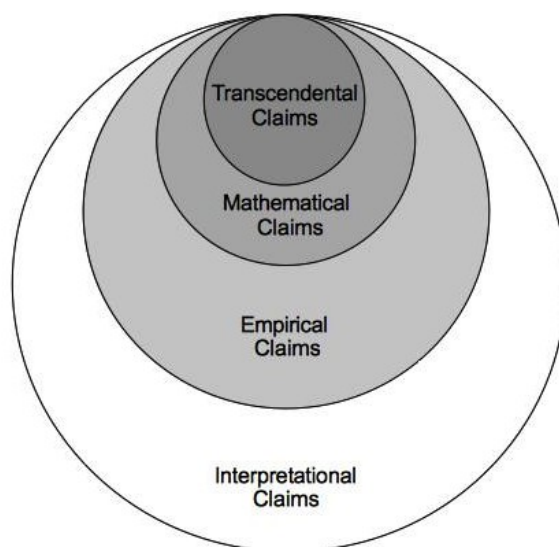
It is interesting to point out that at least some of mathematics is **transcendental** or **synthetic a priori** insofar as the structure of **quantification** is a necessary part of the structure of rationality. The important point is that the axioms modify the basic structure of quantification, and in doing so extend it beyond simple arithmetic (e.g., by allowing quantification over infinite sets). It is thus possible to revise these modifications, but to understand precisely how these revisions take place is a matter of giving a full account of the structure of **mathematical reason**. Importantly, it is the tension between **truth** and **proof** demonstrated by Gödel – the fact that given **any** set of axioms, there will always be some mathematical truths which cannot be derived from them – which makes mathematics **objective**. We might say that far from bringing about the ruin of mathematics, Gödel discovered the very **essence** of the mathematical itself.

Returning to empirical discourse, we can show how it is possible to deploy claims about attitudes in a way which does not bottom out. This is in virtue of the way **observation claims** (or perceptually acquired objectual commitments) function. We owe this insight to Sellars, whose account of perception refuses to take there to be some special dimension of content (what seems to be the case **for-us**) over which the perceiver has a special form of authority. If this were the case, and we needed to justify claims about what **is** by appealing to claims about what **seems** to be, then empirical discourse would bottom out in claims about the attitudes of whoever has this special authority in each case. Sellars' real insight is that claims about seeming play no important role in empirical discourse. When we endorse the observation claims that others make (e.g., 'It is snowing outside'), we do so on the basis of a kind of authority we ascribe to them, namely, a **testimonial authority** that we give to anyone who can **reliably** identify the sort of state of affairs in question (e.g., reliably discriminating between types of weather). However, this kind of authority is **provisional**, and this means that it is possible to put into question the **inference** from an observer's **reliability** under usual conditions to the conclusion that their **attitude** reflects the way the world is in this case.

The crucial point is that arguments about whether an observer's reliability warrants endorsing their observations in a given case are arguments about the observer's **causal dispositions**, the **environmental factors** which affect them, and the **objects** these dispositions are triggered by. These are not claims about attitudes, and this means that empirical discourse does not bottom out in the way that interpretational or transcendental discourse does. Of course, such arguments will inevitably have to depend upon further observation claims, but all such claims can **in principle** be put into question, even if they cannot all be put into question at once. This is a special and rather limited case of

**suspending representation**, insofar as it involves a revoking provisional authority over observation commitments in precisely the way that we revoke the provisional authority we have over the content of our concepts. There can also be more general cases of suspending the use of **empirical concepts** in order to examine the mechanisms underlying their application. For example, we might suspend all uses of the concept of 'aura' to examine whether there are *any* reliable mechanisms underlying its common usage. In the absence of such mechanisms we would do well to deny that it is a genuine empirical concept at all.

So, the question remains: what exactly about the structure of argument shifts in cases of bottoming out? In the case of interpretational discourse, something is **added**, namely, the ability to use claims about attitudes as reasons on the basis of **non-testimonial** forms of authority. In the case of transcendental discourse, something is **subtracted**, namely, the ability to use any claims other than those about the structure of thought itself. Reflective reason involves a **bracketing** of all claims other than those about the very structure of reason itself. On this basis, we can now see that the four forms of discourse we have so far identified form a **hierarchy**, in which claims from the higher forms of discourse may be deployed as reasons in the lower forms, but not vice-versa. They are ordered from highest to lowest as follows: **transcendental** discourse > **mathematical** discourse > **empirical** discourse > **interpretational** discourse. We can also represent this as a **partitioning** of the set of truth claims:-



One could take this setup to suggest that we could do away with interpretational discourse entirely, but this is not exactly true. All discourse necessarily involves the possibility of interpretation, both of individuals and groups. On the one hand, discourse depends upon the possibility of navigating the commitments one's **interlocutors** undertake by their utterances. On the other, discourse depends upon the possibility of navigating the communal norms constituting the **secondary** dimension of conceptual content discussed earlier. Strictly, one need only be able to do these things **implicitly**. However, just as in the case of concept revision discussed earlier, the potential for acquiring the vocabulary necessary to do so **explicitly**, namely, by engaging in interpretational discourse about individuals and groups, is implicit within these abilities.

### iii) The Ideal of Objectivity

Moving on, it is necessary to show why the set of objective truth claims is an **ideal** subset of what we take to be true. The reason for this is that claims are not **included** within the set, but rather **excluded** from it, and the process of excluding them is **potentially indefinite**. What this means is that we take claims to be objectively true by **default**, but that we are under an **obligation** to continuously separate out whatever non-objective claims we find within this default set. This process of separation is potentially indefinite, not only because it involves **recursively** suspending our claims in order to examine the concepts deployed in them, but because, as noted earlier, such suspensions must always be performed **locally**, and thus require that one use some concepts to examine others. This means that although there is nothing that cannot **in principle** be suspended in this way, **in practice** we will never be able to suspend and examine all of our concepts. The task of separation is never finished.

What we can take from this is that objectivity is an **ideal** implicit within the very structure of **truth**. All discourse aims at truth, and the basic structure underlying this is what I've called the **withdrawal of authority**. This involves all of those engaged in the discourse giving up authority over their claims in order to grant such authority to the object of their claims. This is always abrogated to some extent by **conceptual suppression**, wherein we hold fixed the primary content of some of our concepts, in order to make this withdrawal possible. However, we can see that the underlying ideal is that of **maximising withdrawal**. This is why we strive to remove authority from absolutely everyone by **default**, and thus why claims are taken to be objective by default. It is only when debates bottom out in the ways discussed above that we separate them out, but even here we still strive to limit the relevant authority as much as possible. The very structure of truth compels us to divest ourselves of authority over the claims we make to the greatest extent it is possible. This means that we are compelled to talk about the world as it is **in-itself**.

Now, one could still maintain that it's possible to be involved in no objective discourse whatsoever, by holding that one could just engage in transcendental and/or interpretational discourse to the exclusion of all else. However, there is a good argument against this. As we've explained, some form of interpretation is **implicitly** involved in all discourse (including transcendental discourse), and interpretational discourse just makes this **explicit**. We've also showed that interpretational discourse **can** deploy objective claims as reasons, but not vice-versa. The additional insight is then that to be properly explicit, interpretational discourse **must** deploy such objective reasons. In the interpretational debates about both individuals and communities one can always be forced to provide objective claims about what they have **done** that license us to ascribe certain commitments to them. For instance, debates about what an individual believes can always regress to arguments about what sentences they have actually uttered, and debates about communal norms (i.e., about what one **should** do) can always regress to claims about the practices of that community (i.e., about what they **actually** do). Interpretational discourse thus always has some grounding in objective matters.

What this means is that one cannot be fully explicit about **anything** unless one can talk about the way the world is in itself. Given that the potential for such explicitness is contained within all discourse, this means that the very structure of thought and talk implies that there must be **a way the world is in-itself**. This amounts to a **transcendental deduction** of objectivity.

### 3. Towards Transcendental Realism

However, although this is an adequate defence against the correlationist intuition, it does not yet amount to a demonstration of transcendental realism as it was defined earlier. This is because the latter holds not only that there is **a way the world is** in-itself, but that there is a **real structure** of the world in-itself. I'm now going to provide a brief argument for this kind of full-blooded transcendental realism.

First of all, we can agree with Brandom that the **world** is the totality of what is **true**, and that our **picture of the world** is just those claims that we take to be true. However, because we have provided a purely formal account of the distinction between objective and non-objective truth, in terms of an ideal subset of what we take to be true, we can now draw a distinction between the **world** and the **Real**:-

The World: All that is the case. The totality of all that is true.

The Real: All that is **really** the case. The totality of what is **objectively** true.

We can then distinguish between the *formal* structure of the Real, which is just the structure of thought about objective **matters of fact**, and the *real* structure of the Real, which is the structure of the world as it is **in-itself**. The former is a **transcendental** (synthetic *a priori*) and thus **non-objective** matter, whereas the latter is properly **objective** (synthetic *a posteriori*). The former is the object of the **critique of metaphysics**, whereas the latter is the object of **metaphysics** itself. To repeat the distinction:-

Formal Structure of the Real: The structure of discourse about the Real. It is the structure of our **picture of the Real** as opposed to the structure of our **picture of the world**, or the formal structure of the ideal **objective** subset of what we take to be true, in distinction from the set of what we take to be true.

Real Structure of the Real: This is the structure of the world as it is in-itself. This is the **essential** structure of the world as distinct from its **contents**, or what happens to be **in the world**.

We can then say that, because the ideal of objectivity is part of the structure of truth as such, we are **compelled** to move from the formal structure of the Real to the real structure of the Real. Rather than treating the question 'What is the Real?' (or 'What is the world in-itself?') as a question about the structure of our attitudes, we must treat it as an objective question, the answer to which is **independent** of our attitudes. In short, this means that the structure of thought implies that there is a real structure of the world which is not only independent from, but also in **excess** of the structure of thought. This is the essence of transcendental realism.

### Part IV: Kant's Revenge

In the main part of this essay I've provided an analysis of the dialectical terrain of contemporary realism, located the potential for a new position within it – **transcendental realism** – and then provided the outline of an argument for it. In this final part of the essay, I'm going to work out some of the consequences of this position in more detail, and further situate in relation to the historical tradition. Specifically, I will show how it recapitulates and

modified many of the important insights of Kant's philosophy. The moral I would like to draw from this is that far from **rejecting** the critical turn that Kant instigated, the real aim of contemporary metaphysics should be to **radicalise** it. It is precisely only by properly performing the **critique of metaphysics** that we may properly attend to **metaphysics** itself, and we may only do this from a genuinely **transcendental** perspective.

## 1. From General to Transcendental Logic

The first point to make is that the move from the formal structure of the world to the formal structure of the Real is analogous to Kant's move from what he calls **general logic** to **transcendental logic**.

Kant identifies general logic as that which describes the form of thought in abstraction from all possible content, which is to say, in abstraction from its applicability to **objects**. In contrast from this, transcendental logic deals with the form of thought in abstraction from the content of **particular objects**, but in accordance with the content of **objects in general**. The various forms of judgement which constitute general logic, understood in terms of their applicability to objects, are then converted into **categories**, which constitute transcendental logic. The process by which this is achieved is what Kant calls a **metaphysical deduction**. Taken together, the categories also constitute the **concept of an object in general**, or the **transcendental object**.

### i) The Categories

The formal structure of the world, as I have defined it, is just the formal structure common to all discourse. It is governed by a **generic** notion of truth, which does not yet discriminate between different kinds of truth. Within it we can find various other **generic concepts**, which play the same role as Kant's logical forms of judgement. These include **existence**, **predication**, **relation**, **identity**, **essence**, **modality** (in its various forms), **ground** and **consequence**, **number**, **part** and **whole**, among others. These are abstract logical forms which can be deployed within any discourse, including non-objective interpretational discourse such as fictional discourse. The move from the formal structure of the world to the formal structure of the Real involves thinking these notions in their applicability to **real objects** (or **entities**).

This means that in each case the generic concept gets split in two, into one which applies to constituents of the Real and one which does not. For instance, the notion of **generic existence** is split into the notion of **entity** and **pseudo-entity**, and the notion of **generic predication** is split into the notion of **property** and **pseudo-property**. This split allows us to make sense of the first two classical debates discussed earlier, as the questions become: 'Are numbers pseudo-entities?' and 'Are values pseudo-properties?'. In both cases we can modify the deflationary realist position in a systematic way:-

Entity: An **object** is an entity *iff* we take there to be some claims about it that are **objectively** true of it (modified from the Quine Thesis; it is interesting to note that this is very close to Kit Fine's solution to the problems of Quine's approach).

Property: A **predicate** is a property *iff* we take some ascriptions of it to entities to be **objectively** true (modified from the McDowell Thesis).



This also lets us make better sense of the notion of a **aspect** of the structure of the world, or an **aspect of the Real**. In effect this breaks down into a question about whether or not some aspect of our talk about the world is also an aspect of our talk about the Real. There can be aspects of the Real which are not reducible to entities and properties just because there are **categories** other than those of **entity** and **property**, such as that of **modality**.

However, there is a very tricky issue here with regard to precisely how we define the notion of real object (or entity) used to define the notion of category above. The difficulty stems from the fact that there are two kinds of objective truth which constitute the Real – **empirical** and **mathematical** – and thus ostensibly two corresponding kinds of object. My solution here is to say that mathematical objects are **not real**, or that there aren't any mathematical entities. This might seem like an *ad hoc* move, but there is a genuine reason underlying it. It regards an important difference between empirical and mathematical discourse. In empirical discourse, we grant **authority** to objects themselves to force us to revise not only our claims about them, but also the content of the concepts we apply to them in those claims. In mathematics, the objects discussed do not have this kind of authority. Not only **what** these objects are but **which** of them exist is completely **derived** from the axioms, and this means that they cannot play a meaningful role in revising those axioms analogous to the role empirical objects play in revising our concepts of them. One way of looking at this is to say that a mathematical object is not an **in-itself** in the way that an empirical object is. Another way would be to say that mathematical claims are **weakly** objective, whereas empirical claims are **strongly** objective. We must then modify the above categorical definitions to refer to **strong objectivity**, rather than objectivity *per se*. This has the consequence of answering the question of the reality of mathematical objects *a priori*: **mathematical objects are pseudo-entities**.

This move makes sense given the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, mathematics is at least partly **transcendental**, or synthetic *a priori*. The structure of quantification is part of the basic logical structure of thought, and this means that arithmetic and the mathematical objects it discusses, namely, the **natural numbers**, can't be seen as radically independent of our attitudes. This means that there is an important way in which my position is in agreement with Kant, but also an important way in which it breaks with Kant. On the one hand, I am in agreement with Kant in treating the objects of empirical discourse as the primary objects of knowledge, and thus taking the categories as solely applying to them. On the other hand, I am in disagreement with Kant insofar as I take mathematics to be more than simply synthetic *a priori*, and thus take it to genuinely constitute a part of the Real.

Nonetheless, even if we recognise that the mathematical is part of the Real, there is still the question of how it is part of the **formal structure** of the Real. My provisional suggestion is that the formal notion of an **axiom**, which functions to modify the synthetic *a priori* structure of quantification in a potentially revisable way, is the crucial notion here. However, this notion cannot be a **category** in precisely the same sense that existence is a category, insofar as it does not have the same direct application to real objects (or entities). Nonetheless, there is a good sense in which mathematics is applicable to entities, as repeatedly evidenced in the natural sciences. As such, I will draw a distinction between **empirical categories** and **mathematical categories**. I will not provide more examples of mathematical categories here, but I suspect that there are others. As should be obvious, a much more thorough study of the structure of **mathematical rationality** in its relation to **empirical rationality** is required in order to properly flesh out this position.

## ii) Mathematising the Aesthetic

It is nonetheless interesting to note that this split in the formal structure of the Real between the empirical and the mathematical mirrors Kant's division between the **transcendental logic** and the **transcendental aesthetic**. Whereas the former deals with the categories, or **pure concepts**, which provide the very form of the conceptual, the transcendental aesthetic deals with **space** and **time**, or **pure intuitions**, which provide the very form of intuition. The really interesting point is that not only did Kant take the whole of mathematics to be synthetic *a priori*, but that he took it to be derived from the pure intuitions of space and time. The position I am proposing allows us to modify Kant's approach here in at least three ways:-

- 1) The Sellarsian account of perception allows us to deny that there is a distinct kind of **representation**, such as **intuitions**, which must be subsumed under **concepts**, and thus to deny that there are anything like pure forms of intuition.
- 2) We can thus hold that mathematics is properly **conceptual**, but that there is a distinction between **mathematical** and **empirical** concepts (and likewise between **pure concepts** or **categories**).
- 3) We can thus invert the Kantian story, holding that **space** and **time** must be understood in **mathematical** terms. However, because mathematics is nonetheless an **objective** discourse, this means that the Real can in some sense **force** us to revise our mathematical axioms in order to properly understand the **real** structure of space and time. This resolves Kant's inability to deal with both non-Euclidean geometry and the Einsteinian space-time that requires it.

The final consequence of this position is that although we must perform a **metaphysical deduction** of the categories in a manner similar to Kant, the corresponding **transcendental deduction** of the validity of the categories must be very different. Kant's transcendental deduction aimed to show the necessary applicability of the **categories** to the **forms of intuition**, and thus the necessary applicability of **concepts** to **intuitions**. However, the model provided here contains no such split between concepts and intuitions. Instead, the transcendental deduction, which was already sketched earlier, consists in demonstrating the necessity of **objectivity**. In essence, it involves demonstrating that we cannot **think** without **thinking about the Real**.

There is one remaining problem for this deduction, and it rests on another question about the interface between mathematical and empirical discourse. We have provided a brief argument to the effect that it is not possible to **explicitly** engage in **transcendental** or **interpretational** discourse without also engaging in **empirical** discourse, but it might still be possible to hold that one could explicitly engage in **mathematical** discourse without in turn engaging in empirical discourse. Indeed, I earlier posited a hierarchy in which empirical claims could not be deployed as **reasons** within mathematical debates. This would seem to suggest that there could be **autonomous** mathematical reason, in a way which would undermine my attempt at a transcendental deduction of the categories.

The response to this problem is to distinguish mathematical **computation** from mathematical **discourse**. The former simply works out the consequences of a given set of axioms in an algorithmic fashion, but cannot allow for the kinds of **axiom revision** which is

necessary for full fledged mathematical discourse. If we can then show that axiom revision necessarily involves empirical discourse, we will have shored up the transcendental deduction I have proposed. The key to this is to show that there is a **secondary dimension** to the content of mathematical claims, just as there is in the content of other claims, and both that this is essential to the structure of axiom revision and that it can only be made explicit through interpretational discourse, which can in turn only be made explicit through empirical discourse. Unfortunately, this can only be demonstrated by carrying out the more in depth study into the structure of mathematical rationality recommended above.

What emerges from this story is that in order to pursue the genuinely **Neo-Kantian** (or perhaps **Hyper-Kantian**) strategy I have been outlining, we need to tell a much more in depth story about the relation between the primary and secondary dimensions of conceptual content. There lies the key to the transcendental deduction.

## 2. The Question of Being

Kant is remembered more for his **critique of metaphysics** than for the actual **metaphysics** he expounded. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that Kant thought philosophy did not end with critique, but that critique is only a means to the proper pursuit of metaphysical knowledge. This is an idea that I have been advocating strongly throughout the whole of this essay. However, although much has so far been said about what the critique of metaphysics consists in, little has been said about what metaphysics itself consists in. In the last section I outlined the move from the **formal structure of the world** to the **formal structure of the Real**, which is the main part of the critique of metaphysics, in this section I will outline the move from the **formal structure of the Real** to the **real structure of the Real**, which comprises the **whole** of metaphysics.

### 1) Heidegger's Project

The other figure who must be brought in at this point is Heidegger, who perhaps has the deepest vision of the nature of metaphysics after Kant. In order to expound this, it is necessary to be clear about the fact that Heidegger *initially* took himself to be doing **metaphysics**, and indeed, to be doing it more thoroughly than the metaphysical tradition that preceded him. His early work was focused upon **ontology**, which aims to provide an account of the **Being of entities** (*das Sein des Seiende*), or that which defines entities as entities. Following the Aristotelian tradition, he took this to be part of metaphysics, but he deviated from the scholastic variants of this tradition in taking it to be the **core** of metaphysics.

Heidegger also followed the Aristotelian tradition in conceiving the **question of Being** as a matter of unifying the different senses in which 'Being' is said. For Aristotle, these were the being of the **categories** (including **substantiality**, **spatio-temporality**, **quantity**, **quality**, etc.), **potentiality** and **actuality (modality)**, the possession of **accidents (predication)**, and **being-true (truth)**. Despite rejecting Aristotle's manifold of senses, Heidegger never established his own definitive list. Nonetheless, there is good evidence that he saw the problem of defining entities *qua* entities in terms of uniting the different senses in which 'Being' could be said of them.

However, Heidegger's real innovation over this tradition was to see the potential for approaching the question, in a way independent of any given list of senses of Being, within

the tradition itself. He did this by carefully reconstructing the idea of metaphysics as that which asks after **entities as a whole as such**. This means that metaphysics in general is concerned with **entities as a whole** and with **entities qua entities** in its guise as ontology. Heidegger then diagnosed the inherent problem with the tradition as **onto-theology**, namely, its tendency to understand both of these in terms of entities. Traditionally, metaphysics ends up understanding entities as a whole in terms of some **privileged entity** (e.g., God) which functions as the ground of their existence, and understanding entities *qua* entities in terms of some **property of entities** (e.g., *Physis*, *Logos*, *Hen*, *Idea*, *Energeia*, Substantiality, Subjectivity, Objectivity, the Will, the Will to power, the Will to will, etc), which he calls **beingness** (*Seiendheit*). Heidegger's own strategy was to try and locate the structure of entities *qua* entities (**Being**) within the **structure** of the whole of entities.

Now, Heidegger called this structure of the whole '**world**', and understood it in **phenomenological** terms as a temporal horizon projected by the thinking entity, or **Dasein**, within which entities are **given**. This is what underlies the early Heidegger's identification of **phenomenology** and **ontology**. This early approach failed, precisely because, in attempting to locate Being within the structure of this temporal horizon, it made Being completely dependent upon Dasein. Heidegger's mid to late work replaces the notion of world with a more complicated structure, in which Dasein's projection of a world is in **strife** with a fundamental excess (called **earth**) which it can never fully assimilate. This structure is articulated in various ways (including as the fourfold of gods, mortals, earth and sky), but we will lump all of these together under the heading of **Ereignis**.

Ultimately, Heidegger abandoned the original Aristotelian question, coming to the position that there cannot be an answer to the question of entities *qua* entities, in the sense of an answer that would overturn all the various conceptions of beingness the metaphysical tradition has provided. Instead, he took it that **Ereignis** presents the structure underlying the succession of **historical epochs** within which these conceptions of beingness emerge, and that we must **overcome metaphysics** by describing this structure. The development of Heidegger's thought can thus be understood in terms of the way he switches the reference of the term 'Being' from the unifying structure of entities *qua* entities to the structure of the **givenness** of entities as a whole. This is a move from the **Being of entities to Being as such**, from **Sein** to **Seyn**, or from **Sein** to **Ereignis**.

## ii) Beyond Heidegger

Now, we must reject Heidegger's position both early and late, insofar as in both cases it collapses back into some form of correlationism. However, we can accept many of Heidegger's innovations over the Aristotelian tradition. The parallels between these insights and the position I've so far been articulating will become clear shortly, but it is first important to point out where the most important divergence from Heidegger is to be found. The position I've been articulating advocates a thoroughly **representational** account of thought, as opposed to the **presentational** account of thought that Heidegger inherits from Husserl. This means that we cannot view the structure of the whole of entities as a **phenomenological horizon** within which entities are **given**. We must nonetheless accept Heidegger's point that whatever this structure is, it cannot be understood in terms of some kind of privileged entity.

The natural way to move beyond Heidegger can be seen by attending to the other name

he gives to this structure of the whole in both his early and late periods: **truth**. What this indicates is that the natural replacement for the presentational notion of world/Ereignis is the account of world that Brandom takes over from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. On this account, the **world** is all that is the case, or the totality of what is **true**, and the totality of what we take to be true is our **representation of the world**. We can then understand the Heideggerian strategy for answering the question of Being as seeking to unify the different senses in which 'Being' is said of entities in the **real structure of the Real**. Moreover, we can understand the question itself as seeking the underlying unity of the various **aspects** of the **formal structure of the Real**, which is to say the unity of the various **categories** in their applicability to entities (or real objects). This lets us formulate the question of Being in a way independent of any given list of categories or senses.

In essence, what this shows us is that Heidegger's **question of Being**, when shed of its phenomenological trappings, coincides with the task of **metaphysics** as we have so far defined it – to move from the **formal** structure of the Real to the **real** structure of the Real. Furthermore, we can draw a series of additional insights from this fact:-

- 1) The move from the formal to the real structure of the Real can be understood as uncovering the **underlying unity** of the various **categories** in their applicability to entities. This indicates that we cannot properly understand the various **aspects** of the Real that the categories correspond to in isolation from one another.
- 2) Heidegger's claim that we must have some **pre-ontological understanding** of Being in order to answer the question of Being is satisfied by this account, insofar as the formal structure of the Real is **implicit** within the structure of thought as such. Indeed, we can identify this pre-ontological understanding with what Kant calls the concept of an object in general, or the **transcendental object**.
- 3) We must avoid understanding the real structure of the Real in terms of a privileged entity (i.e., **onto-theology**). For example, this means we must reject both Leibniz and Spinoza's account of the world, in which God either plays a privileged role (Leibniz) or is taken to be identical to the world itself (Spinoza).

However, although these insights help us flesh out the account of metaphysics provided above, we still do not have an adequate idea of **what it is** to move from the formal to the real structure of the Real, or, indeed, **how to do it**. The rest of this section will try to sketch an answer to these questions.

### iii) Metaphysical Concepts

The answer to the first question lies in the fact that, if it is to get at the **real** structure of the Real, metaphysics must be an **objective** discipline. This means that there must be some sense in which the world can force us to revise our **metaphysical claims** and the **metaphysical concepts** that constitute their content. The relevant question is this: what are these metaphysical concepts? The answer is that they are the concepts which pick out the **aspects** of the world to which the various **categories** correspond. The categories provide the **form** of these concepts, to which metaphysics adds **content**, and it is this content which the world can force us to **revise**, even if the categories themselves are **fixed**. Metaphysics is thus a matter of interpreting the content of the categories, or developing our **pre-ontological** understanding of Being into an understanding of Being **as**

it is in-itself.

It is helpful at this point to provide an example. I will pick the category of **modality**, insofar as it highlights the difference between the **transcendental realist** approach and the **deflationary realist** approach discussed earlier. The deflationary realists about modality (Lewis and Brandom) take the world to have a modal structure, but they take this structure to be exhausted by the **semantics** of modal discourse about the world. As such, Lewis takes there to be **possible worlds** and Brandom takes there to be **incompatibility relations** between predicates and between states of affairs. The transcendental realist on the other hand is able to interpret the **metaphysical significance** of the semantics of modal discourse, rather than simply taking it to reflect the structure of the world.

For example, one could be a Spinozist about modality, and hold that there is strictly speaking nothing other than the **actual** world, and that whatever happens is strictly **determined**, but that there are nonetheless real **modal features** of entities, such as **capacities** (or **affects**). This position holds that whichever capacities are actualised are in some sense **necessarily** actualised, but that our talk about **possibility** nonetheless makes sense, because it plays the role of **individuating** the capacities of both individuals and general kinds. A Deleuzian might then add that capacities are not the only modal (or **virtual**) feature of entities, but that there are also **tendencies**, which are individuated by our talk about **probabilities**. This would be a further example of interpreting the metaphysical significance of a category implicit within the structure of our thought and talk about the world.

What all of this means is that there are a series of metaphysical questions corresponding to whichever categories we locate through the metaphysical deduction: What are entities *really*? What are properties *really*? What are essences *really*? What relations *really*? What is modality *really*? Etc. In each case, the 'really' indicates that what is sought is the **real** structure of the corresponding aspect of the Real, rather than the **formal** structure of the aspect of thought about the Real.

We can see that this schema is the consequence of breaking the **reciprocity** of the sense-dependence Brandom posits between the structure of the world and the structure of thought. Just as understanding the structure of thought is **necessary** but **insufficient** for understanding structure of the world, so it is for the various pairs of fundamental concepts Brandom located: we must understand the concept of **singular term** to understand the concept of **entity**, but there is more to understanding the latter than understanding the former; we must understand the concept of **predicate** to understand the concept of **property**, but again there is more to properties than the structure of predication, and so on for the various other concepts. There is thus an important correspondence, and an essential gap, between **logical concepts** and **metaphysical concepts**.

However, a proper critique of metaphysics should not only give us an idea of what it is to do metaphysics, but also how we should go about doing it. It is in relation to this that the first insight we drew from Heidegger rears its head. We can't properly understand any of these various metaphysical concepts in **isolation** from one another. We require a **systematic** picture of the real structure of the Real, or a **unified** account of Being. The critique of metaphysics must thus be able to show us how metaphysics can be approached in such a systematic way. I do not claim to be able to fully answer this question here, but I believe that I can point to where metaphysics must begin.

#### iv) Metaphysics and Ontology

The crucial point is that the task of metaphysics, or the question of Being, is to unify the various categories in their applicability to **entities**. This is a point common to both the Aristotelian formulation of the question of Being, and to the Kantian conception of categories. What it means is that the category of **real existence** (or the concept of **entity**) has some form of priority in relation to the other categories. It is by first asking 'What are entities?' that we can get a grip on the other metaphysical questions we must tackle. This does not mean that this question can be answered independently of the others, only that it should be our entry point into thinking about them.

However, this seems to contradict Heidegger's Aristotelian interpretation of the question regarding **entities qua entities**. Surely, this can only be answered by the question of Being as a whole? The answer to this is yes *and* no. As we have just admitted, the question of what entities really are cannot be answered properly in isolation from the various other question which make up the question of the underlying unity of the categories. However, there is a way of understanding the question which gives it a kind of relative autonomy from the question of unity. This is to understand it as asking after the **beingness** of entities, in precisely the way that Heidegger castigated the metaphysical tradition for. This means understanding the narrow form of the question 'What are entities?' as a matter of **abstracting** a general concept of entity from the **totality of entities** given to us by empirical discourse. For example, one might take all entities given by the natural sciences to be understandable in processual terms, and therefore take it that **entities are processes**. One would then proceed to answer the various other metaphysical questions in relation to this, for example, by working out how the properties and modal features of processes must be understood.

In short, all of this means that we can accept half of Heidegger's critique of onto-theology, namely, that **Being** (or the real structure of the Real) should not be understood in terms of a privileged entity, but that we must reject his claim that one cannot genuinely inquire into Being by inquiring into **beingness**. This is because beingness (or real existence) is a genuine **aspect** of Being.

On this basis, we can formulate a neat division between the various questions of **metaphysics** and **ontology**:-

The General Question of Metaphysics: What is **Being**? What is the **real structure of the Real**? What is the structure of the world **in-itself**?

The Particular Questions of Metaphysics: What are entities? What are properties? What is essence? Etc.

The Question of Fundamental Ontology: What are entities? What is the real structure of entities *qua* entities?

The Questions of Regional Ontology: Are numbers entities? Does God exist? Do fundamental particles exist? Etc.

This means we have rejected the Heideggerian definition of **ontology** in favour of its more classical definition as a sub-discipline of traditional metaphysics, although we accept

Heidegger's thesis that it is the **core** of metaphysics. It is also helpful to note that what analytic metaphysics calls metontology (not to be confused with what Heidegger calls metontology) is here labelled **fundamental ontology**, and what it calls ontology is **regional ontology**. Another way of drawing this distinction, advocated by Dale Jacquette, is in terms of **pure ontology** and **applied ontology**, respectively.

What emerges from this section is that although, on the one hand, the radicalised Kantian project I am recommending does not reject metaphysics, but must be seen as a continuation of the metaphysical tradition to some extent, on the other hand, it must nonetheless be seen as pursuing a genuinely **post-Heideggerian** metaphysical project. I have so far painted the critique of metaphysics as a matter of making **explicit** what was already to some extent **implicit** within classical metaphysics, in order to pursue such metaphysics properly. However, we could also view this in more Heideggerian terms, as the attempt to **formulate** the question of Being that the classical tradition has **forgotten**, but which nonetheless provides its hidden impetus.

### 3. Science and Metaphysics

The other interesting feature of Kant's philosophy is the privilege he gives to the **natural sciences**, and thus his forging of an explicit relationship between **science** and **metaphysics**. We are now in a position to work out the consequences of the account I've been providing for this relationship.

#### i) The Structure of Science

The first thing to note is that the account of thought and talk I have been advocating is committed to some form **semantic holism**. This is because I follow Quine and Brandom in rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction, although I take myself to have improved upon their accounts, insofar as the Hegelian account of thought I have introduced allows me to explain the intuitions underlying the notion of analyticity. What this means is that, at least with regard to the set of claims we take to be **strongly objective** (it is important to remember that the set of what we take to be true is **partitioned**, and that these partitions have a **hierarchical** relationship), we can see our commitments as constituting what Quine calls a **web of belief**. This is a nice visual metaphor, where we understand our observational commitments to sit at the edge of the web, facing what Quine calls the **tribunal of experience**, and then both the commitments which these depend on, and those which constitute the contents of the concepts deployed within them, to sit further in, so that the further we get into the web the more distant we get from experience. Quine held that in principle we could always make changes to commitments further towards the **core** of the web in order to hold fixed commitments at the **periphery**.

Now, Quine initially held that logic could be found at the very core of the web, but he later retracted this idea. The reason for this is that logic provides the very structure of the web itself. Brandom has emphasised this fact very strongly: the structure of revision cannot itself be revisable (at least not *entirely*). Another way of putting this is to say that the structure of the web is **transcendental**. The important question then is this: if logic does not lie at the core of the web, what does? On my account, it is **metaphysical concepts** which lie at the core. This nicely mirrors Quine's initial intuition, insofar as these are not **logical** concepts, but the **metaphysical interpretations** of these concepts.



Now, to understand the consequences of this idea, we have to understand that the **sciences** are the principal discourses through which we acquire objective knowledge. This is because they structure themselves around the **ideal of objectivity**. In the case of the **natural sciences** (or **empirical sciences**) they are structured around the ideal of **strong objectivity**, insofar as they make experiment the final arbiter of all claims. In the case of the **mathematical sciences**, they are structured around the ideal of **weak objectivity**, insofar as they attempt to derive all of their claims from axioms which are nonetheless potentially revisable. Now, there has been plenty written in the philosophy of science about how the actual practice of science fails to live up to these ideals, or even how these ideals are approached in incommensurable ways through the use of differing **methodologies**. I don't wish to go into these debates in much detail. I accept that these ideals can be realised in a variety of ways and thus that science will always have to address **methodological questions**. This is what it means for the structure of revision to itself be **partially revisable**. There is an interesting story to tell about how these methodological questions interface with what I earlier called the **secondary dimension** of conceptual content, but I will not attempt to tell it here. The important point is simply that nothing about the difficulties of realising the ideal of objectivity detracts from the ideal *qua* ideal.

## ii) Reciprocity and Continuity

Now, insofar as metaphysics is a matter of interpreting the categories in their applicability to entities, and the notion of entity is defined in relation to the notion of strong objectivity, there must be an important relationship between **metaphysics** and **natural science**. Indeed, we can see that metaphysics **depends** upon natural science. This is because metaphysics does not describe the **Real**, but the **real structure of the Real**. Describing the Real is the job of science, and metaphysics is thus dependent upon it for its **material**. To describe this more concretely, insofar as metaphysics must begin by abstracting a general concept of **real existence** from the **totality of real entities**, it requires science to provide it with the set of entities it must abstract from. It is only in virtue of this connection to natural science that metaphysics can claim objectivity, because it is only through this connection that it can potentially be forced to revise its concepts.

However, the relationship is more complex than this. Metaphysics is not something that appears **after** natural science, but is always already **implicit** within it. This can be seen by appealing to the metaphor of the web of belief, which provides the **ideal** structure of natural scientific inquiry. The transcendental structure of the inquiry implies that the **core** of the web is always there, even if it is more or less developed, or more or less explicit. Metaphysics is implicit within the ideal of objectivity, and science is structured by this ideal, therefore metaphysics is implicit in science. We can even see this in the practice of science itself. Einstein's supplanting of the Newtonian picture of the universe is a truly metaphysical revolution, insofar as it obliterates the absolute conception of the metaphysics of **space** and **time** that were more or less implicit within it. The Darwinian revolution in biology continues to challenge the way we think about the very notion of **types** of entities (and thus of **essence**), and complexity theory is forcing us to revise the way we think about **part-whole relations**. These are all cases in which science is already doing metaphysics, it is simply not doing it in a fully **explicit** manner. The task of the critique of metaphysics is precisely to make it explicit, so that it can be done **properly**.

What all of this means is that **metaphysical discourse** is actually a well-defined subset of **empirical discourse**. It also means that the relationship between natural science and

metaphysics is not **one-way**, but a matter of **reciprocal** influence. Metaphysics plays the role of **organising** the most fundamental concepts deployed within the natural sciences, and thus can play a very positive and explicit role within them, but in doing so it must also be **sensitive** to the results of those sciences, because experimental results and the theoretical innovations which follow them can ultimately force its revision. In essence, we can say that metaphysics and science are **continuous**, but this need not imply that the distinction between them is at all **vague**.

### iii) Mathematics and Metaphysics

The final question to explore is that of the relation between **mathematics** and **metaphysics**. There is not too much that can be said here, given that I have already admitted that a more in depth study of the structure of mathematical reason is required, so as to describe the structure of the revision of both **mathematical concepts** and **mathematical axioms**, through which we can determine precisely what the **mathematical categories** are. However, there are a few remarks that can be made. First of all, it must be the case that mathematical categories play some role in metaphysics, insofar as mathematical concepts can be **applied** to entities, and metaphysics is just a matter of unifying the categories in their applicability to entities. Indeed, there is a good sense in which the **primary content** of many of the empirical concepts deployed within the natural sciences is in part mathematical (e.g., wave-form, chemical equilibrium, allele frequency distribution, etc.). This is possible because **mathematical discourse** > **empirical discourse**.

Now, the applicability of mathematics to entities **in themselves** is an important issue in contemporary continental metaphysics, and is ostensibly the problem that motivates Meillassoux's **speculative materialism**. I think there is at least one point of common ground between Meillassoux, Badiou and the position I am articulating here. Both of them hold that mathematics does not describe a special domain of entities (i.e., mathematical objects), but that it instead describes the **Being** of all entities. This is in broad agreement with my position, insofar as I take mathematics to describe the **Real** without describing any **entities**. The difference between our positions is that they take Being to be **exhausted** by the mathematical, which I think misses the real point of metaphysics.

## 4. Fundamental Deontology

The most powerful of the criticisms originally levelled at Kant, by none other than Fichte, was that the *Critique of Pure Reason* could not account for the possibility of the very form of knowledge it exemplified. This led to a series of attempts by different figures to establish both an account of the **nature** of critical knowledge and a **method** for achieving it, culminating in Hegel's attempt to create a completely **presuppositionless** philosophy, and Husserl's attempt to create a purely **descriptive** phenomenology. Each of these in its own way strove to achieve a kind of critical **immanence** lacking in Kant's work. I will bring the essay to a close by contemplating how the project I have outlined can meet this ideal of immanence.

### i) Pragmatic Contradiction Revisited

I have already provided a **partial** account of the nature of critical knowledge. This is because I have provided a description of the basic structure of **transcendental**

**discourse.** On this account, transcendental discourse is at the top of the discursive hierarchy, meaning that transcendental claims can be deployed in all other discourses, and that the **criterion of truth** of transcendental claims is that the negation of the claim implies a **pragmatic contradiction**. Strictly speaking, this criterion is too broad. The kind of pragmatic contradiction involved must be one which is not dependent upon anything about the person making the claim, meaning that claims like 'I am talking', the negation of which is such a pragmatic contradiction, should not come out as transcendental claims.

Instead, the kinds of pragmatic contradiction we are concerned with are those which undermine the very **structure of rationality** itself, or the structure in virtue of which anyone can have an **attitude** about anything. Another way of saying this is that transcendental claims are those the negation of which would make rationality **impossible**, and thus those that represent **conditions of the possibility of rationality**.

For example, the claim that one need never provide reasons for one's claims undermines the very structure of justification. It is tantamount to licensing **bare assertion**, in which the very fact that one takes something to be true is meant to ground its truth. This would amount to saying that authority is never **withdrawn** from the speaker. The corresponding transcendental claim is then that there must be at least some cases in which bare assertion is not permitted. These are all cases in which the speaker does not have some form of **stipulative authority** over the matter at hand. From this ban on bare assertion it is very easy to derive a ban on **circular reasoning**, because it involves justifying a claim by appeal to itself, which ultimately collapses into bare assertion.

So, when we say that the kinds of pragmatic contradiction that we are interested in are those that undermine the structure of rationality, what we are really interested in are those pragmatic contradictions which undermine the possibility of **truth**. The crucial point is that the possibility of truth is also dependent upon the possibility of **falsity**, and this possibility is established by the **withdrawal of authority**. This is why the withdrawal of authority provides the basic structure common to all types of truth. The kinds of pragmatic contradiction we are interested in are principally those that undermine this withdrawal.

## ii) Radicalising Scepticism

The account so far provided also suggests the beginnings of a **method** for elaborating the transcendental structure of rationality, insofar as it suggests that if one **brackets** all other claims, one is left with transcendental discourse. This follows from the place of transcendental discourse within the discursive hierarchy sketched earlier. This idea presents an interesting connection with the projects of both Hegel and Husserl.

Husserl's phenomenological method is predicated upon the idea of **bracketing** all evidence **given** in experience in order to provide an immanent description of the structure of **givenness** itself. He calls this an *epoche*, and takes it to be a radicalisation of Cartesian scepticism. In contrast to this, my alternative method would bracket all **reasons**, in order to provide an immanent description of the structure of **rationality** itself. This could equally be described as a radicalisation of Pyrrhonian scepticism, which is an **inferential** scepticism, rather than an **evidential** scepticism. This form of scepticism is more fundamental, both because the phenomenological position can itself be bracketed from within the Pyrrhonian standpoint (but not vice-versa), and because, as Sellars has showed us, we can provide an account of experience from within the structure of reason that has no need of notions

such as **givenness** or **evidence** (it's also interesting to note that the very notion of an *epoche* originates with the Pyrrhonians). Nonetheless, there is plenty to learn from Husserl's methodological rigour in any attempt to construct a counter-phenomenological method.

It is now a matter of immense interest that Hegel's attempt to create a truly presuppositionless philosophy is motivated by his encounter with Pyrrhonism. Although this philosophy only comes to fruition in the *Science of Logic*, in which he forces thought to immanently think its own structure starting from the least it can possibly think (which he names Being), the project of the *Logic* is **justified** by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The goal of the *Phenomenology* is to prove that what Hegel calls **Science** is the correct mode of knowing, as opposed to the mode of knowing he calls **Natural Consciousness**. We gave a brief description of the structure of this mode of knowing earlier, and most of the results so far produced are dependent upon it. Situating the current project in relation to Hegel's own project would thus be doubly enlightening.

There are two important features of Hegel's project:-

- 1) The concept of Natural Consciousness is for Hegel just the concept of the **separation** of **subject** and **object** (or **thought** and **Being**), whereas the concept of Science is just the concept of their **unity**. One is the **negation** of the other, meaning that there is no ground in between the two. This means that one **must** adopt the standpoint of either Natural Consciousness or Science.
- 2) Hegel takes it that Science cannot justify itself without **circularity**, and that it must instead be justified from **within** the standpoint of Natural Consciousness. The *Logic* begins from standpoint of Science, and thus has a single assumption: the **unity** of subject and object, or the **identity** of thought and Being (i.e., **classical idealism**). The *Phenomenology* justifies this assumption by attempting to show how the concept of Natural Consciousness systematically undermines itself, thereby **negating itself** and becoming its opposite – the concept of Science.

However, the point which is not made explicit in all of this is that Hegel is taking up the challenge of Pyrrhonian scepticism. This challenge is best presented by the Agrippan trilemma:-

Agrippan Trilemma: How does one justify any claim, without a) **bare assertion**, b) **circular reasoning**, or c) appealing to another claim which itself must be justified *ad infinitum*, i.e., **regress**?

The Pyrrhonian initiates this challenge by asserting the **negation** of any claims their interlocutor makes, thus creating a state of **equipollence**, where we must choose between the claim and its negation. We are then confronted by the trilemma, because to break equipollence, we must provide **reasons** to accept one or the other of the claims, and for whichever reasons we give for either claim, the sceptic will assert their negation, reintroducing equipollence and leading us into a vicious regress.

Hegel recognises that if he can justify the assumption of the identity of thought and Being, he will be able to carry out an immanent deduction of the structure of thought (and thus also of Being) that requires no further assumptions (this is why the *Logic* is also a

metaphysics). The important thing to note is that this presuppositionlessness arises because the very form of Science does not allow for the introduction of equipollence at all. Each point in the dialectical development (Being, Nothing, Becoming, etc.) is necessitated by the last, making it impossible for the sceptic to assert its negation. However, Hegel must still justify the initial assumption which constitutes the structure of Science (or **absolute knowing**), and he must do this on the sceptic's own turf, so to speak.

Hegel's real innovation is that he realises that the Pyrrhonian is not without his own assumptions. To realise this, one must recognise that if one were confronted with a sceptic who merely asserted the negation of all of one's claims, one would not have a **philosophical problem**, one would have a **heckler**. The sceptical problem is only a genuine problem when it is **posed**, as it is in the form of the trilemma. The sceptic must show how the very structure of **justification** undermines itself, so that what we aim at in making claims is by its own nature impossible. However, in order to do this, the sceptic must actually **describe** the structure of justification. Hegel attempts to defeat the sceptic by beating him at his own game, namely, by describing the structure of **justification, knowing, or claiming, better** than the sceptic does, and then showing how that structure – which supports the very equipollence that makes scepticism possible – systematically undermines itself, and thus justifies Science.

As we have already seen, Hegel does an excellent job of defining this structure. I would even go so far as to say that he describes the essence of claiming with a clarity and precision unparalleled in the history of philosophy. However, this does not mean that he has gotten it **right**. The pertinent question is this: how do we know that the structure cannot be described in a manner more adequate than Hegel's account? What this question demands is a genuine **method** to immanently describe the structure of rationality. This is where Hegel falls down, insofar as he simply posits his concept of natural consciousness without presenting us with anything like criteria for assessing its adequacy. To refute Hegel is to develop such a method and to show his account of Natural Consciousness wanting. This would not be to declare it incorrect, but simply to show that it is insufficient, to show that there is more to the ordinary (non-dialectical) structure of justification than he countenances and that the argument of the phenomenology fails because of this. The proper anti-Hegelian maxim is this: **Natural Consciousness contra Science**.

What we can take from this encounter with Husserl and Hegel is that we require a method for the immanent description of the structure of rationality itself, and that the way to achieve this method is by radicalising Pyrrhonian scepticism. This method involves **bracketing** all claims, only to leave those that are **immune** from bracketing, namely, transcendental claims about the conditions of the possibility of rationality itself. The question that remains is this: what kind of claims are these?

### iii) Transcendental Normativity

The answer to this is to be found by returning to Kant's fundamental insight that thought is conceptual, and that concepts are essentially **rules**. For Kant, thought is an essentially rule-governed activity. The more modern way of putting this is to say that thought is an essentially **normative** matter. This lets us characterise precisely where Husserl went wrong. The systematic rigour of his phenomenological epistemology is admirable, as is the radicality of the phenomenological *epoché*. The problem is that he picked the wrong object

to describe: **evidence** rather than **inference**, **givenness** rather than **bindingness**. The counter-phenomenological method we require concerns itself precisely with this bindingness or **normativity**. Rather, than describing the fundamental structures of consciousness, it aims to describe the **fundamental norms of rationality** – those norms by which we are bound simply in virtue of making claims at all, or those norms that provide the **conditions of the possibility** of rationality itself. In contrast to Husserl's phenomenology, I call this descriptive enterprise **fundamental deontology**.

It is only by immanently describing these **transcendental norms** that we can uncover the subset of these norms which we are bound by insofar as we make claims about the **Real**. These latter norms are just what we have called the **categories**. This allows us to extend the narrative I have given so far about the primacy of **epistemology** in relation to **ontology**. We can now see that, in turn, **deontology** has primacy in relation to epistemology. The practice of **critique** must begin with deontology, even if it does not end with it. The maxim here is this: **deontology is first philosophy**.

It is important to point out here that this does not mean that, as Levinas claims, **ethics** is first philosophy. There are different forms of normativity, and not all norms we are bound by are strictly transcendental ones. **Fundamental** deontology deals only with these transcendental norms, and thus must be distinguished from other normative discourses, including ethics, which would be **interpretational** rather than transcendental. This does not mean that fundamental deontology is completely isolated from ethics. There is a good sense in which there must be a **critique of ethics**, just as there must be a critique of metaphysics, and it must also proceed by describing transcendental norms. Kant obviously recognised this himself (though we needn't accept his own deontological conclusions). This critique plays the role of what is usually called **meta-ethics**.

Now, ideally, I should posit some basic methodological principles governing fundamental deontology and then proceed to derive all of the results provided so far from them. Ultimately, this is the form that the project must take, but I will not begin it here. I will however give a working outline of what these methodological principles should be:-

The Primary Bind: This is the principle that there are **some** transcendental norms. It is demonstrable by pragmatic contradiction, insofar as one cannot deny that one is bound by the same norms of argument as one's interlocutors without destroying the argument itself. There can be disagreements about what we might call **subsidiary** norms of argument, but the **fundamental** norms must be held in common, as these are what define the argument *qua* argument. For example, if an interlocutor points out that one cannot justify one's claims via circular reasoning, one cannot simply hold that this norm doesn't apply to you, without thereby undermining the very structure of argument itself (i.e., by collapsing the structure of the withdrawal of authority, and thus undermining the possibility of truth).

The Principle of Correction: This is the principle that by default, one is entitled to **explicitly correct** one's interlocutors. Argument would not be possible if one was not able to correct one's interlocutors in the manner of the above example, because pragmatic contradiction could never be made explicit. However, if one is to do this, one must therefore be able to explicitly state the transcendental norms from which the pragmatic contradictions follow. It is this principle which underlies the fact that transcendental claims can be deployed in all other forms of discourse. Although there are some cases in which transcendental claims might play some kind of **positive** role (e.g., mathematics, metaphysics, ethics), their

ubiquity derives from this **corrective** role.

The Principle of Autonomy: This is the principle (inherited from Kant), that one can only be bound by **commitments** to which one somehow **binds oneself**. This means that one has a unique **authority** over which commitments one undertakes, both **theoretical** (objectual and conditional) and **practical** (individual and collective). **Norms** are just **collective practical commitments**.

Now, this last principle is the most complicated. It has a host of consequences. First, although one has a **unique** authority over which commitments one undertakes, one does not have a **complete** authority. If one could simply specify in every case what one was committed to, one could not genuinely be **bound** by anything. For example, if one could retroactively specify the content of one's theoretical commitments in every case, one would be in the position of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, able to mean anything by anything, and thus not able to mean anything at all (this is also the thrust of Wittgenstein's private language argument), whereas if one could retroactively specify the content one's practical commitments, one could simply redefine one's obligations so as to get out of any contract one is part of. What this means is that, in both cases, there must be a distinction between the **force** and the **content** of one's commitments. One is **uniquely** authoritative over the force of one's commitments (i.e., *whether* one is bound), but one must to some extent **withdraw** one's authority over the content of those commitments (*what* one has committed oneself to).

This has the result that one must be able to undertake commitments that one does not **fully** understand the **consequences** of. One undertakes commitments both through what one **says** and through what one **does**. The relevant question is to what **extent** one must grasp the consequences of what one is saying or doing in order to be counted as undertaking the commitment. There is a very complex debate to be had here, which I will not go into in depth. The important point is that whatever the **criteria of commitment** are they can vary from case to case. However, there is one very special case in which one can have no theoretical grasp of what one is committing oneself to, and nonetheless still be committed. This is the case of the **transcendental norms** themselves. These norms form the **limit-case** of autonomy, insofar as one commits oneself to them in virtue of doing anything that can be counted as **rational**. This is to say, one is committed to them insofar as one can be committed to anything. This is because they are the norms which specify **what it is** to be committed to anything.

What all of this means is that arguments about **force** will always be matters of **interpretation**, insofar as they concern authority. Arguments about the content of our commitments will always involve interpretation to some extent (this is partly what is involved in the secondary dimension of conceptual content), but whether or not they count as interpretative will depend upon whether and how they **bottom out** in claims about attitudes.

Arguments about the content of **objective** theoretical commitments don't bottom out, arguments about the content of **non-objective** theoretical commitments do bottom out, and arguments about the content of practical commitments split in two directions, one of which bottoms out and one of which can go either way.

Arguments about **what it is** to do what the commitment entails can either bottom out or not

bottom out, depending upon whether the content is made explicit by objective or non-objective theoretical commitments (e.g., what it is to heat steel to melting point, and what it is to score a goal in a football match, respectively). Arguments about **which** thing we are to do must bottom out, but they can either bottom out in claims about the attitudes of the **individual** who undertakes the commitment (**individual interpretation**), the attitudes of the **group** that determines the norm (**collective interpretation**), or about the structure of attitudes *as such* (**transcendental reflection**).

Ultimately, what emerges from the principle of autonomy is a further principle:-

The Principle of Reflexivity: The structure of normativity can only be described in normative terms. This is what underlies the fact that transcendental discourse is at the top of the discursive hierarchy. John McDowell gets at the essence of this principle with the phrase: "It's norms all the way down."

So, what we find is that the primary bind codifies the **existence** (but not the reality) of transcendental norms, the principle of correction codifies their **ubiquity** in relation to other forms of discourse, and the principle of autonomy (via the principle of reflexivity) codifies their **independence** in relation to these other forms.

#### iv) Nature and Culture

If we assume that we can manage to reconstruct the results of the main part of the essay within the framework just presented, then we can posit an additional principle:-

The Principle of Asymmetry: The distinction between the natural realm and the normative realm, between **Nature** and **Culture**, is neither a natural distinction nor is it a distinction in some higher term (e.g., **Being**), but is itself a normative distinction. From the side of culture there is a sharp divide between the two, yet from the side of nature there is none.

What this means is that we can conclusively respond to Heidegger's challenge to Kant. At the beginning of *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that Kant has done a good job of giving an account of the kind of Being belonging to **Nature**, but that he has failed to inquire into the kind of Being belonging **subjectivity**, which his whole philosophy is predicated upon. This is why Heidegger's project begins with an analytic of the Being of Dasein, which is his successor to the notion of the subject. Against Heidegger, and in favour of Kant, we can claim that **the subject has no Being**. The **transcendental subject** is a purely formal 'I', and although it may need to be indexed to some real **entity** (e.g., a human being), this index is not a genuine **property** of that entity. Nor is the structure of rational subjectivity a real **essence**. This is because none of these are properly **objective** matters.

This also enables us to revive a some version of the distinction between **facts** and **values**. Facts are just objective truths, whereas values are non-objective truths. However, this does mean that there is a distinction between **transcendental** and **historical** values.

In essence, the **Real** is nothing but **Nature**, albeit a nature which is intrinsically mathematical, because objective discourse is nothing but talk about Nature and the mathematical structures embedded in it. We are compelled to talk about the world as it is **in-itself**, but in doing so we are also compelled to leave all of the **normative machinery** (both transcendental and historical) required to talk about it out of the picture.



## v) Varieties of Criticism

The final issue to address is the status of **critique** itself. At the beginning of this section, I said that the account of thought presented in the rest of the essay provided a **partial** account of the nature of critical knowledge. Despite fleshing out the nature of transcendental discourse, this is still the case. The reason for this is that although transcendental critique is its most fundamental **form**, it is not the only one. The last part of this section will be devoted to both defining the more general concept of critique, and to highlighting the other forms it can take: **historical critique** and **empirical critique**.

To do this I'm going to try and trace a **critical tradition** that begins with Kant and extends well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The figures I have in mind are Kant, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Foucault, although there are almost certainly others who could be fitted into this tradition in some way. What unifies these thinkers is the attempt to analyse the structures of thought in order to diagnose systematic errors or illusions that these structures create, so as to free us from these illusions. For Kant, this is a matter of preventing the overextension of reason; for Wittgenstein, it is a matter of preventing us from running our heads up against the limits of language; for Foucault, it is a matter of uncovering the 'historical limits of necessity'; and for Nietzsche, well, it's somewhat more complicated...

The important point is that each of these figures is in some sense concerned with the **conditions of representation**, and how these conditions might distort our view of the very things we are trying to represent. Kant and the early Wittgenstein are concerned with the specifically **transcendental** conditions of representation – the **ahistorical** structure of thought and language. Nietzsche, Foucault and the later Wittgenstein are all concerned with the specific **historical** conditions of representation – the language-games, epistemes, and networks of power relations that constitute the **social** dimension of representation. Nietzsche is then somewhat unique among these thinkers (though he would find many allies in contemporary philosophy) in also concerning himself with the **empirical** conditions of cognition – the **psychological** and **biological** structures which make thought possible.

The account of thought I've so far provided gives us a way of describing each of these different projects in a unified way, in virtue of the notion of the **suspension of representation**. Representation is suspended when we hold in abeyance the assessment of a claim about an object in order to examine the conditions which make it possible to represent the object. Now, in Part III this was mainly described as a matter of bringing into question the commitments which constitute the **primary content** of the concepts that constitute the claim. However, as has been suggested at times, suspension has a much broader range than this. What is common to the various forms of critique is that they implement suspensions of representation that **abstract** from primary content, whereas what differentiates them are the different kinds of conditions of representation that they examine.

Transcendental critique is the most fundamental form of critique, insofar as the **bracketing** it must perform is the closest thing we can get to a **global** suspension of representation. As has been noted, such global suspensions cannot be used to examine the content of our objective concepts, insofar as one must always **use** some concepts to **examine** others. The deontological *epoche* is not quite a global suspension of the kind discussed earlier, insofar as transcendental claims about the normative structure of discourse are immune to it. Nonetheless, in bracketing all other claims, it abstracts from the content of all ordinary

concepts in order to describe the structure of concepts as such, including the structure of concept revision. This is to say that it abstracts from the **primary content** of all concepts, leaving only the **form** of the conceptual.

By contrast, historical and empirical critique deal with the structures of **specific** concepts (or networks of concepts). However, they don't suspend the claims these concepts are deployed in to examine the primary content of these concepts, but instead to examine the **secondary content** which structures the process of conceptual revision **in each case** (as opposed to the **general** structure of such revision). Historical critique examines both the networks of deference which constitute the **anaphoric** dimension of content, the **social practices** underlying the **practical** dimension of content, and the sociological structures that both these dimensions are situated in relation to. Empirical critique examines the way that other empirical factors shape our practices of dealing with things and using words, and by extension the sociological structures they are tied up in. As such, it is harder to draw a crisp distinction between these two forms of critique than between them and its transcendental form. Both deal with historically contingent structures, and both may deal with specifically social structures. The real distinction lies in whether they describe these structures in **normative** (interpretational) or **causal** (empirical) terms, or rather, the extent to which they use either. In truth, both are required to some extent, and this is why it is hard to draw the distinction properly. In essence, the distinction depends upon whether the emphasis is placed upon **hermeneutic** or **natural scientific** forms of explanation.

Once more, I must admit that without a more in depth account of the nature of secondary content and the nature of the suspension of representation, I am unable to provide a more detailed account of the nature of critique. Nonetheless, we are in a position to glimpse the general character of the critical impulse. Critique aims to pick apart the various structures underlying the process of knowledge acquisition, which is both the process of acquiring claims and the process of revising our concepts, in order to differentiate **legitimate constraints** on this process from **illegitimate** ones. It is a kind of conceptual technics through which we both uncover the properly **transcendental** limits of knowledge while removing **historical** and **empirical** impediments to it. The project outlined in this essay is thus doubly critical: critical insofar as it is **transcendental**, and critical insofar as it seeks to give a transcendental account of the process of **empirico-historical criticism**, so as to facilitate critique in all its forms.

The final point to make is that just as we saw that **scientists** are already doing **metaphysics** to some extent implicitly, so it is that **philosophers** are already doing **critique** to some extent. This is the whole purpose of the schema 'philosophy of X' (e.g., philosophy of science, philosophy of art, philosophy of law, etc.). Philosophers are already **conceptual technicians**, even if this is not all that they are. Following the ideal of explicitness, our goal should be to make explicit precisely what philosophers are already doing in these cases, so that it might be done **properly**, just as it has been the goal of this essay to make explicit what scientists are already doing.

On this basis, we can draw a distinction between the **critical** and the **constructive** dimensions of philosophy, the former exemplified by transcendental philosophy and the latter exemplified by metaphysics. The former dimension maintains the structure of knowledge, while the latter aims to actually produce knowledge, by creating new concepts which order existing fields of inquiry.

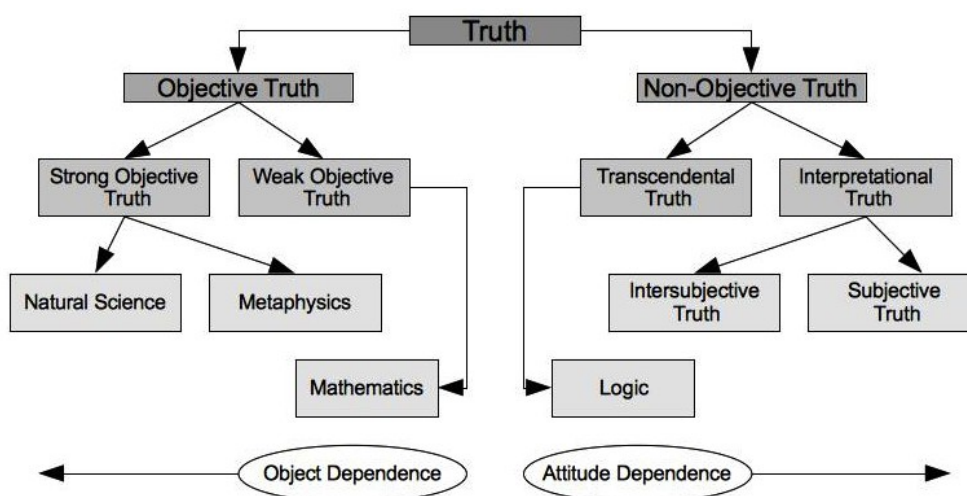
## Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to announce the possibility of something like a transcendental realism, and to do so by engaging both with contemporary debates about realism and with the historical tradition more broadly. In the course of it, I have not only defined what such a transcendental realism would be, but also provided an argument for it, and worked out many of the details and further consequences of it. What has emerged across all of this is the necessity of once more returning to the philosophy of Kant, as it seems we are destined (or doomed) to do every hundred years or so. However, this call for a renewed take on the Kantian project is motivated neither by nostalgia, nor by some deep seated frustration with the contemporary philosophical terrain. It is neither a call for novelty for its own sake, nor a call for tradition for its own sake. It is motivated by a problem that is deeper than such trite narratives.

On the one hand, against deflationists, anti-realists, correlationists, and all other anti-metaphysicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we seem to genuinely understand the **significance** of metaphysical questions. On the other, against the pre-critical metaphysicians and those who would return us to the era of unconstrained speculation, we are not so sure that we know **what** this significance really is. The only response to this is a **critique** of metaphysics, which defines its exercise and its limits, and the progenitor and most powerful exponent of that critique is Kant.

However, as I have also demonstrated, this renewal of Kantianism should also be critical in the more common sense of the word. There is as much in Kant that is ripe for revision as there is that is ripe for appropriation. First of all, following the last wave of Neo-Kantians, we must excise the transcendental aesthetic and the dependence upon non-conceptual forms of representation that it embodies. Second, we must also update both the theories of and the perceived relation between **logic**, **semantics**, and **pragmatics** underlying Kant's conception of thought, to adopt the insights of Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, Brandom and others. These two changes amount to a substantive revision of the whole of Kant's account of thought, along the lines already discussed.

On the basis of this, we must revise the Kantian **architectonic** of reason. This must be done by distinguishing the various forms of rationality in terms of the way they modify the withdrawal of authority, and thus in terms of the types of truth they correspond to. It is possible to use the insights so far provided to provide such a **taxonomy of truth**:-



Here we can see that the various types of objective truth can be ranked in terms of the extent to which they grant authority to objects, and thus the extent to which they are **object-dependent**, and the types of non-objective truth can be ranked in terms of the extent to which they grant authority to individuals attitudes, and thus the extent to which they are **attitude-dependent**. For instance, natural scientific truth is more object-dependent than metaphysical truth because the former can depend upon specific kinds of entities, whereas metaphysical truth is dependent upon all entities equally. In a similar vein, subjective truth depends upon the attitudes of a specific individual who has unique authority, whereas intersubjective truth depends upon the attitudes of groups of individuals, none of which need have this kind of authority. Mathematical and logical truths are distinctive insofar as they are not dependent upon **any** specific objects or attitudes.

This schema is not exhaustive, insofar as there are many further subtypes of truth that are not presented in it. For instance, we could distinguish **ethical truth** and **aesthetic truth** (the major concerns of Kant's second and third Critiques) as further types of intersubjective truth. We could equally break down mathematics into its logical (**quantificational**) and non-logical (**axiomatic**) parts, as well as breaking down logic into its **general** and **transcendental** parts. There is thus much work to be done in extending this taxonomy of truth and the corresponding architectonic of reason.

Beyond this, we must do something about the infamous notion of the **thing-in-itself**, the poor reception of which has haunted Kant's philosophy since its inception, in order to retain the kernel of insight it represents while banishing its more problematic connotations. This means rejecting any ontological understanding of the difference between **phenomena** and **noumena**, and reconceiving the latter as the concept of the **ideal limit** of the rational process of revising our theoretical commitments, which can be thought in relation to any given entity. However, much more needs to be said about precisely how to understand this limit-concept, and the relation between it and the notion of the Real.

Finally, we must establish a method (which I have called **fundamental deontology**) to recapitulate all of these insights in an **immanent** and **systematic** fashion. This is a daunting task, but it is one that is undoubtedly worthwhile. If nothing else, the promise of working out both what **thought** demands of us, and what the **world** demands of us, is too good pass up.